

# EAST OF ATHENS

*By*  
ERIC GIFFORD



---

THE TRAVEL BOOK CLUB  
121 CHARING CROSS ROAD LONDON W.C.2

*First published 1939*

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON, LTD., THE  
TRINITY PRESS, WORCESTER, AND LONDON

TO  
MY MOTHER

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Athens - - - - -	11
II	Famagusta, Nicosia - - - - -	23
III	Nicosia, Kyrenia - - - - -	33
IV	Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos - - - - -	42
V	Rhodes - - - - -	50
VI	Athens - - - - -	61
VII	The <i>Providence</i> , Istanbul, Smyrna - - - - -	74
VIII	<i>Khedivial Mail</i> - - - - -	89
IX	Cairo - - - - -	98
X	Cairo, Port Said - - - - -	112
XI	Athens - - - - -	122
XII	Corfu* - - - - -	132
XIII	The <i>Thraki</i> , Haifa, Tel Aviv - - - - -	150
XIV	Palestine - - - - -	160
XV	Petra - - - - -	166
XVI	Crete - - - - -	178
XVII	Mykonos - - - - -	186
XVIII	Samos - - - - -	197
XIX	Andros - - - - -	205
XX	Batsi - - - - -	212
XXI	Tinos - - - - -	220
XXII	Aegina* - - - - -	230
XXIII	Chalkis, Kimi - - - - -	239
XXIV	Skyros - - - - -	247
XXV	Χαίρετε - - - - -	255

\*Strictly speaking, these are west of Athens—but who cares?

MAHARANA BHUPAL  
COLLEGE,  
UDAIPUR.

*Class No*.....

*Book No* .....

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

An Evzone	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>
						<i>Facing page</i>
Kyrenia Harbour	-	-	-	-	-	34
The Monastery of Ayios Neophitos—near Paphos	-	-	-	-	-	44
Via Dei Cavallieri, Rhodes	-	-	-	-	-	52
Porta D'Amboise—Rhodes	-	-	-	-	-	58
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul	-	-	-	-	-	78
Cairo Citadel	-	-	-	-	-	114
Athens: Mt. Lycabettus	-	-	-	-	-	128
A Young Albanian	-	-	-	-	-	138
Jerusalem—The Damascus Gate	-	-	-	-	-	162
The Duhr Prayer	-	-	-	-	-	168

## CHAPTER ONE

### ATHENS

IT is fashionable at the present time, to regard all actions from the psychological standpoint. One seeks the hidden, the subconscious motive, for one's own and other peoples' behaviour. It is legitimate, therefore, to discuss the Psychology of Travel; and to endeavour to run the *wanderlust* to earth. Why do I travel? Why, when I'm comfortably settled in one place, am I immediately possessed by an urgent desire to go somewhere else? Especially when some wretched little boat is rolling wildly under me, I ask myself that question. I find it extraordinarily difficult to answer. It isn't as if I fell into one of the extreme categories. I don't belong to the class of people, in whom the sight of a ship produces immediate symptoms of nausea. Neither, for that matter, am I one of those who like a 'good stiff breeze'.

Most people have heard the story of the woman who boarded a ship just at sailing time. Being a bad sailor, she went to her cabin, and prepared for the worst. For some reason the ship didn't sail. Unconscious of this, however, she spent the whole night being violently sick. It is obvious, of course, what her trouble was. Whether the shock of finding the boat still docked in the morning cured her, the story doesn't tell.

At the other end of the scale, I have a friend whose idea of 'fun' is a trip from Harwich to the Hook in a

## EAST OF ATHENS

storm! Everyone to his taste For myself, I am definitely a fair weather sailor That is to say, that if the sea is calm, so is my inside At seasick moments I say, never again, but even as I say it, I know that I don't really mean it In fact, I've almost given up saying it now, except in extreme cases But nobody can guarantee a calm sea, and I am even prepared to set out in a storm Set out that is, rather than stay where I am Freud and Jung would doubtless explain it in terms of neuroses What fun they would have had dissecting the motives of our buccaneering ancestors One almost regrets that they didn't live in Elizabethan times

The Elizabethans hadn't even the excuse of the ship's siren That Pied Piper's whistle hadn't yet been invented to lure people to sea But for anyone on whom it has a fatal effect, the islands of the Aegean, and in fact the whole of the eastern Mediterranean, were *especially created* In many cases the distances are so small, that the voice of the siren can be answered daily, or even sometimes twice daily

The islands too, have, many of them, that micro-cosmic quality which delights the heart of the true island lover Their very names Rhodes, Lesbos, Crete, hold a magic still That magic of certain place names, which no amount of disillusionment can ever really shatter

In England, the tradition of the Classical education dies hard Even now, in the middle of the twentieth century, the ideas of what we term the 'educated classes' are largely coloured by a feeling of the supremacy of Greek culture In the majority of cases it is true, this feeling goes no further than a placid acceptance of the theory that the Classical automatically



## ATHENS

connotes the Good and the Beautiful. In the minority, it produces a passionate philhellenism (we even have a special word for it), which colours all their lives and thoughts. I myself was spared a Classical education. I had few fixed illusions, therefore, on which to build my mental picture of Athens. Memories of the Elgin Marbles; photographs of the Parthenon, by moonlight and otherwise. These contended with descriptions read, of what it had been in Byron's time: a squalid village, falling rapidly into decay under the heedless rule of a Turkish pasha. Then, with the Akropolis a barracks, Lord Elgin's agents had been free to hack away carvings and smash pediments, in order to send booty to England.

Superimposed on all this, like a double exposure, was the memory of some war-time spy story. This had had an Athenian setting, in which the principal characters had belonged to various Legations and Consulates. They seemed to spend most of their time, I remembered, having hectic intrigues at beach *cafés*, or moonlight picnics on the Akropolis. Naturally the picture resulting from all this was not very clear. As I came to know Athens better, however, it all fell into place.

Athens does not make a good first impression. For one thing the noise is bewildering. Cars stand in line behind one another, all hooting, obviously just for the pleasure of making a noise. The hooting has no visible effect on the other traffic. Trams clash and jingle, and street vendors shout their wares from all sides. In fact everybody shouts. If it is summer, columns of dust swirl along the streets.

Maybe the fact that I wasn't very lucky over my first

## EAST OF ATHENS

visits to Athens prejudiced me against the city. My first involved a sharp attack of dysentery, and the second coincided with the Venezilists' abortive revolution of March 1935. As for the third, that was almost the worst. I arrived the following June, to find the elections in progress. Hot and thirsty, I loudly demanded "Beer!" The waiter looked at me pityingly. "After the voting is over," he said.

I once argued the respective merits of Rome and Athens with a young Scottish sculptor, a *Prix de Rome*. He, condemned to study at the British School in Rome, pined continually for the classic glories of Athens. I, poor fool, who might have remained in Athens, had struggled with great difficulty and discomfort to Rome. Neither could see the others point of view. I might grant him that the clear air of Athens was like his native Aberdeen on a spring morning. I don't know Aberdeen. But classical remains in general leave me cold. My interest ends with the sixth century, with the culmination, or perhaps the beginning of the degeneration, of the original Sumerian and Egyptian model. By the time the Hellenistic period is reached, my chief reaction is nausea.

To me, on the other hand, Rome spelt romance. Not the classical Rome, which Mussolini is so busy digging up and sticking together, but the tawny Renaissance Rome of Tiber side and Vatican, of St. Peter's, and the Castel S. Angelo. Not the classical Rome, but the Rome of Marion Crawford. The Rome of White society and Black society, of intrigues, and vast pantomimic Papal ceremonies. I am fully aware of the theatrical absurdity of much that I see. Deliber-

## ATHENS

ately, however; I allow myself to be drugged by the surfeit of colour and stately ritual.

When I receive, say a large yellow card of invitation to a consistory in the *Aula della Benedizione*, I am enchanted. I put on my *frak e cravatta bianca* knowing that I shall thoroughly enjoy myself. Or perhaps it will be a plum coloured invitation to Pontifical High Mass in St. Peter's on Easter Sunday. That is almost as good. But to my Scottish friend, Popery and Fascism were equally anathema; a fact which, I dare say, largely coloured his view point. From what I judged of his character, it will have remained unchanged.

I, on the other hand, now that I know Athens better, have yielded more to its charm. Nobody could describe it as a beautiful city. But when one considers that since the war it has about quadrupled its population, perhaps this is not surprising. Obviously a small and poor city cannot add three-quarters of a million inhabitants in a few years, and still keep tidy. Unpaved streets abound, even in the heart of the city. That can be, and is being remedied. The pity is that little or no attempt was made at town planning. Of course, the shacks and booths of the refugee settlements didn't help matters. Still, after the 1922 *debâcle*, the repatriates had to be housed somewhere.

In the centre of the city, the majority of the buildings are in the worst late nineteenth century taste, stucco monstrosities abounding in florid excrescences. Every year, however, more and more blocks of flats in the modern German style, gaunt and severe, are displacing these older buildings. An improvement, this, though far from being an ideal. And the street lighting, or rather the lack of it! But after a time, one ceases to notice all

## EAST OF ATHENS

that One becomes conscious merely of the atmosphere

Athens is a gay city Not in the way that Paris or New York are gay, but with a lighthearted ease of manner, and a slightly ingenuous sophistication It is a city that never sleeps, or at most, merely dozes in the summer, during the afternoon heat No matter what the hour, there are always idlers at the *cafés* On summer nights the 'Dancings' along the beaches at Phaleron and Glyphada are crowded until dawn

Everything begins late in Athens The five o'clock tea is transposed an hour or two later Between six and eight, the *cafés* opposite the *Hotel de la Grande Bretagne* are crowded with fashionable women and their escorts, putting away large quantities of rich pastries Beside the slender young girls, very often, sit their mothers, living examples of the result of a rich diet In consequence of this, dinner, like in Spain, becomes almost supper, and the various entertainments which follow it are proportionately late Not that there is much in the way of organized amusement, beyond the cinemas and a few cabarets The average Athenian seems to find sitting at *cafés* watching the crowds and interminably talking politics to be entertainment enough

But, you say, this is telling me nothing of the real, the classical Athens All right, go to the Akropolis one cloudless day Climb up to the Parthenon Then, shutting your eyes to the tripods of the photographers, to the tourists, the guides, the park benches, and to the huddled grey city at your feet, gaze long and earnestly out to sea Or choose some night of full moon, and sit there, if they'll let you, in some quiet spot, for a long while I'll guarantee that you will absorb more of the

## ATHENS

spirit of ancient Greece, than you will from months of poring over inscriptions and statues: 'Marble, from the original in bronze by Myron, the legs, left arm, torso, and head later additions.' Which doesn't mean, I may add in parenthesis, that the Athens Museum is not worth a visit. The first room on the left as you go in, is.

The Greeks are a friendly people, and hospitably inclined. If some of them are inclined to try and cheat you in business dealings, they are just as likely to spend their ill-gotten gains on your entertainment afterwards. If they succeed in the cheating, that is. If they do not, they will certainly bear you no ill will on that account. Rather they will respect you the more for your superior shrewdness.

I had a rather amusing example of petty cheating from a Cypriot Greek. We were living at the time in an old Turkish house just outside Kyrenia, on the north coast of the island. It was early autumn, and we were sitting with our backs to a half-open window. Suddenly we heard a soft patting noise behind us. I looked round. A large viper was swaying its head backwards and forwards rhythmically, beating softly against the window frame. As I turned I was just in time to see it drop to the floor, and disappear under the couch where we were sitting. Jumping up, I kept an eye on where the snake had hidden itself, while M. hurried out to get hold of someone with a weapon.

Presently she returned with half the village at her heels. Various armed with spades, mattocks, and pitchforks, they were out for blood. The snake was playing for safety, and had to be prodded from his hiding place. There was a wild scuffle, in which our

## EAST OF ATHENS

living-room looked more like suffering than the viper

Round and round, over the couch, under the table, round the standard lamp charged a multitude of peasants, brandishing agricultural implements, and whooping with excitement

Finally, however, the brute was dispatched with a blow which almost severed its head. Thankfully I distributed *baksheesh*, and the slayer, a carter, proudly bore away the corpse. But that was by no means the last I was to see of it.

The next morning the carter reappeared under my window, complete with snake. He had but that moment, he announced, slain at great trouble and expense another colossal snake. This also, had been so bold as to try and climb in at our window. I remarked sceptically that the body looked very like that of the previous night's victim. Oh, no, he assured me, Miss Munch (our next door neighbour) had actually witnessed the slaying of this one. I remained somewhat sceptical all the same. "All right," I said, "come back this evening for your *baksheesh*."

Later on in the day I took the opportunity of inquiring from Miss Munch. "Oh," she exclaimed indignantly, "he told me that he'd killed that snake in my garden. I gave him a shilling!" "Now," I said, when the carter came back that evening, still carrying the snake, "go and fetch the other snake. Bring them both here at the same time." The carter gave a broad grin, and walked off. It remained a little joke between us for ages afterwards. When I met him, I would murmur, "Snake," and he would grin.

Of course, much of this attitude must be put down

to the centuries of Turkish domination, when it was a case of cheating the conquerors. In those days, the Cypriot made the most of what little he had, against the ever present time when it might be snatched by some rapacious pasha. In the same way, the detractors of the modern Neapolitans should remember the centuries of Bourbon terrorism. A terrorism incidentally, which England enabled to continue a while longer, after it had almost been broken. That though, was the worse oppression, when the Inquisition ruled, and priests swarmed ant-like over the land. The days of the *tirapiedi* are over, happily, but the memory still lingers.

There is an idiot Armenian who wanders about the streets of Nicosia. Nobody pays much attention to him now. But if you ask, you will be told that he used to be a brilliantly clever child, almost an infant prodigy. Until that is, the day the Turks entered his home. They beheaded his father, mother, and brother in front of his eyes; then they raped his sisters, and carried them off. And yet many Greeks will tell you that they regret the Turkish rule. If the laws were oppressive, at least they could be avoided. The administration was haphazard; and there were always opportunities for judicious graft. Then, they say, we had no money, but at least we could eat. After all, a sensible man doesn't starve his livestock; they can't work if he does. Now when we have no money, we starve. Another complained: When we were under the Turks they sent pashas and the sons of pashas to rule us; the British send us shop keepers and the sons of shop keepers!

Another legacy of the Turks, is the bead habit. It used to be the custom in Moslem countries to carry a

## EAST OF ATHENS

rosary, on which to tell the ninety-nine Attributes of Allah. Now these rosaries of amber, wood, glass, leather, or what you will, have lost all religious significance. All the same, they are still carried by Turk and Greek alike, simply for the sake of something to fiddle with in idle moments. Everywhere beads click, rattle, and swing with maddening persistence.

It is not just a pose or an effeminate habit. The beefy peasant waiting for the bus, will sit clicking his 'Conversation beads' as he calls them, letting them slither from hand to hand. Even the policeman on duty has them dangling from his finger. If a Greek hasn't a rosary to fiddle with, he will use a key chain, preferably with a bunch of keys at the end. Thus he will swing in circles. Round his finger it coils, then uncoils itself again. Generally it is within an inch of taking the face off some passer-by.

The average Greek *café* idler rarely reads, unless to glance at the newspaper. He is, however, a persistent talker and arguer. Often he appears so excited and enraged, that one expects the fight to begin at any moment. Then suddenly, everyone will burst out laughing, and clap each other on the back.

In Cyprus, Greek and English society scarcely mixes. The English officials effect to despise the Greeks as 'natives'. It gives them a sense of importance, they like the comfortable feel of the 'white man's burden'. In Greece on the other hand, they court Greek society, and affect to despise the English colony. We ourselves knew few Greeks in Athens, our Greek friends being mostly in Corfu and the islands. We knew, however, many of the English and Americans. On these we burst



## ATHENS

from time to time, from Cyprus or Rhodes, from Mykonos, or Samos, or Crete. We would appear suddenly in the hospitable drawing-room of Mr. Miller, the *Morning Post* correspondent.

Mr. Miller would be holding forth with genial vehemence on some pet topic to Miss Rebecca West, or whoever the visiting celebrity of the moment might be. She was the one on the occasion of my last visit, and so springs to mind. I remember admiring her eyes, and her sense of humour. Lamenting too, the rather ugly mouth, which spoils what might have been a beautiful, as well as an interesting face. Ensconced behind one of those vast collections of elaborate silver, beloved of Edwardian wedding present givers, Mrs. Miller would be dispensing tea. She never could remember just where we were supposed to have come from on any particular occasion. I don't blame her. Keeping a track of our movements would have been an all time job. Thanks to the complicated system of inter-island steamers, we could appear and disappear like Jacks in the box.

Up to a few years ago, the Greek Government subsidized a steamship service to Syria. Antique boats of some four to five hundred tons, carried passengers and cargo from Athens to Beirut, via Rhodes and Cyprus. On these, as on the inter-island steamers, one could buy a 'deck' passage for next to nothing. In the eastern Mediterranean, deck travelling is an honoured institution. The deck passenger has the run of all the open parts of the ship. With him he may bring, besides his ordinary baggage, his pets and livestock.

Hens, dogs, cats, and even on occasion kids and lambs, gambol, bark, cackle and commit nuisances.

## EAST OF ATHENS

unrebuked. Larger animals, such as pigs and mules, must go below in the hold.

The deck passenger eats and sleeps where he likes. No part of the deck is sacred from him. If he is sufficiently presentable in appearance, and can outstare the steward, he takes a first class deck chair. He will rarely be disturbed; at any rate by day. At night the steward can, if he wants to be nasty, remove the canvas from the chair. In that case there are generally some wooden benches, which are quite comfortable to sleep on; and of course, the deck itself. Officially the deck passenger must bring his own food. This generally consists of bread and cheese, with olives, fruit and wine. Actually, however, food can be got from the galley. If a jacket is worn, even buying a whole meal in the saloon, is winked at.

In summer, quite apart from the economical question, deck is the only possible way to travel on these ships. Below, the cabins give a foretaste of Hell. In them the Greek, heavily swathed in woolly garments, covers himself with a blanket, and sleeps peacefully. But the average European must lie naked, and imagine he is having a Turkish bath.

I was in Cyprus when an unexpected ten pounds gave me the opportunity of getting my first glimpse of the Aegean. Needless to say, that whetted my appetite for more. I planned an ambitious itinerary, covering over two thousand miles in three weeks. That I kept to my itinerary, and within my ten pounds, says something for the cheapness of travel in the Levant. I was to catch the boat at Famagusta. This was my second visit. I remembered the curious impression it had made on me when I arrived from Port Saïd, almost two years before.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FAMAGUSTA, NICOSIA

ON that occasion we had arrived at Port Saïd from Morocco on a British-India boat, which chugged laboriously into the Suez Canal a day late and just in time for us to see the weekly connection with Cyprus disappearing in the distance. We said good-bye to the only amusing people on board; a retired publican and his wife, who had been consistently snubbed by the rest of the passengers during the whole voyage, and prepared to gather together our multitude of belongings. We had come heavily laden, and saw with alarm our trunks, cases, bales and crates hang precariously over the oily waters of the canal. We followed them in a launch to the customs house, where cases of books, which I could not have moved, were picked up by the *fellâhin* porters as if they were so many empty biscuit tins. We had never anticipated having to go through the customs at Port Saïd, thinking we would merely transfer from one boat to another. Now, however, it was apparently necessary for everything to be examined. This was the more alarming as the key of one of the trunks was missing and we did not relish the idea of its being forced open and left to continue its travels in that state.

We were nearly two hours in the Customs. Everything was opened and minutely examined, until

## EAST OF ATHENS

nothing remained but the fatal trunk, and a small attache case By this time we had got beyond caring I was just about to open my mouth and explain about the missing key, when the Customs Officer yawned, stretched himself, looked at his watch, and marking the two remaining pieces, turned his back on us and strolled away

I remember little of that first stay in Port Saïd, save that the weather was incredibly hot and sticky, that the hotel was bad, and that the week's wait seemed interminable

As everything comes to an end at last, so the seventh day found our trunks and crates again suspended over the canal, and ourselves in a launch on our way to the *Khedivial Mail* steamer

The voyage from Egypt to Cyprus takes the day and most of the night, so that it was still dark when we arrived at Famagusta

Coming on deck in the early morning, I found the boat docked beside a deserted quay Flanking it was a high wall over which a solitary palm tree fluttered It was late August and even at that early hour intensely hot Everything seemed dead

But presently officials appeared passport officials, and Customs Officials, and porters, and even a few loiterers And later, having passed from hand to official hand, we were free to discover what lay behind that high stone wall, where the palm tree still waved its solitary head

A great archway led out from the quay Beyond was an open space planted with trees, across which a few nondescript houses and *cafes* faced us And to right and

left the massive town walls stretched away, enclosing apparently nothing more exciting than large patches of waste ground, on which rubbish dumps and occasional palms picked up a scanty nourishment.

Everywhere the dust lay thick. It rose about our feet in great clouds as we walked. The road appeared to continue round behind the houses, so we plunged on. A town of winding streets, where flat, white-washed buildings, corrugated iron sheds, and filthy hovels, mingled haphazardly with medieval remains and heaps of stones, sprawled ahead of us.

Arched doorways led nowhere. Rose windows, glassless now, gazed blindly down on tin roofs. Carved blocks of stone lay where they had fallen. Then suddenly we were in an open square, and on our left was a Gothic cathedral. Stuck on top of one of its decapitated towers, a tall, white minaret flanked it incongruously. We sat down on a convenient block of stone, where two giant sycamores threw a welcome shade.

Everything was very quiet. The dust deadened footsteps, and in any case, there seemed to be scarcely any inhabitants to this strange town. We had met a few men in tarbushes. A few women in short skirts, and short hooded capes of vivid coloured artificial silk: emerald green, purple, or scarlet, who had drawn a corner of the cape across their faces at our approach, and gazed at me intently out of one eye. A few children had given up playing in the gutter in order to demand "two shilling". Exorbitant *baksheesh* in a land where the labourer is paid eighteen pence a day! A donkey or two had shuffled by, and one solitary, mangy, but still supercilious camel.

## EAST OF ATHENS

This was all very well, but an hotel was necessary, and this town just did not look like the sort of place which possessed one. I looked round for someone likely to be informative. A military policeman, very smart in khaki tunic and shorts, puttees and red tarbush, was wheeling his bicycle along the road. I hailed him and asked the way to the hotel. A blank stare and a flood of Greek met me, then an abrupt throwing back of the head, accompanied by a loud clucking noise. This I knew was the Eastern negative, for I had learned to employ it effectively in Egypt when pestered by street hawkers, convincing them with one gesture that nothing could be expected of me. This time it did not seem quite in place, however. I had not then discovered that it was not considered necessary for the police or government officials in a British colony to speak any English!\*

Not being any wiser for my interview, we decided to carry on in the same direction and hope for the best. After a few more windings among buildings and ruins, we came once more upon the town walls, massively stretching away into the distance. In the days of the Lusignan kings, there were said to be more than two hundred churches within the walls of the city, which will give some idea of their extent. Stuffed and sweaty, we were about to give up in despair, when an antique open carriage, drawn by a positively threadbare horse, overtook us. Under its white awning were some of our fellow passengers, who waved as they disappeared in a cloud of dust, through an arch in the wall.

\*It was I should add three years later made an obligatory subject for candidates for government posts.

## FAMAGUSTA, NICOSIA

Our spirits rose. Here was something to follow. We plunged through the narrow, tunnel-like archway in pursuit, finding ourselves on a stone bridge. Below us lay the ancient city moat, now thickly overgrown with trees and shrubs. Ahead stretched flat, open country. And there was the carriage, rattling away down a long tree-lined road. This did not look so good, but on we plodded, wishing now that we had taken one of those carriages ourselves. The road seemed miles long, but after a while, buildings began to appear. There were pompous buildings of yellow stone, and wooden bungalowoid creations, and then, wonder of wonders, a complete village railway station, with a real, if not very impressive, train at rest. There was a post office and a bank. There was a *café* which announced a cabaret entertainment; so we must really be getting near the hub of things at last.

Presently shops appeared; mostly provision merchants, ironmongers, barbers and cobblers. The road had become a street and we were in the town. This was a scene of bustle and animation by comparison with the dead city of the port. Carriages jingled up and down and bicycles skidded in every direction. People came out on to their doorsteps to view the strangers, and then went back to call further members of their families, lest they should miss the fun.

The Greeks must be the greatest starers in the world. Everything the slightest out of the usual, such as a stranger, will collect a group to gaze with interest; though rarely is the staring rude. They have the common continental habit of being able to regard a good-looking woman or youth with a bland childlike stare.

## EAST OF ATHENS

And they will still go on staring even when they are seen, instead of blushing and looking away as the average Anglo-Saxon does

Just then we spotted a good-looking young policeman. Perhaps he might be brighter than the previous one, I decided to have another shot at asking for an hotel. This time, thank goodness, we were luckier, and found a speaker of English. Was the hotel far? Oh, no, right beside us. He would personally conduct us, and present us to the proprietor, a friend of his. He would return when we had refreshed ourselves, and in fact, place himself at our entire disposal during our stay!

The hotel proved to be fairly primitive, but spotlessly clean, and with large and airy rooms. So we thankfully installed ourselves, arranging to send for our baggage from the port. There was a restaurant below, where, for ten piastres we consumed roast partridges and aubergines, and bunches of the enormous black grapes, for which Cyprus is famous.

It is hard to get used to the nine copper piastres, which make up the Cyprus shilling. There is always the feeling that one is getting wrong change, as well as the difficulty of doing mental calculations in terms of one and one-third pence. Luckily the rest of the coinage is similar to the English.

We had scarcely eaten when the policeman returned. He would take us to drink coffee and see the town. M. was convinced that a siesta was more needed, and I did not blame her. The heat was really overwhelming. Going into the streets was like passing the open door of a furnace. But I decided, for the sake of politeness, to



## FAMAGUSTA, NICOSIA

go out for a few minutes. I was duly shown the market, the English club, the police station, and the way to the bathing place. Here a magnificent beach and sand dunes stretched for miles along the coast. In the distance I could distinguish clumps of palms. At least, so I thought. But what was my disappointment to find that my palms were really steel windmills from Toronto. There is no surface water, and the big orange plantations, which flourish in the red, sandy soil, are irrigated by artesian wells.

I drank sticky, Turkish coffee, and discussed the United States—goal of his ambition, as it is that of so many young Greeks. Generally they succeed in getting there, if only by marrying some girl with a good dowry. The marriage over, they take the money, and hurry away; leaving the bride to wait for them in Cyprus until they have made their fortune, or in some cases for ever.

This dowry system is the ruination of fathers with many daughters. When a girl baby is born in Greece or Cyprus, her father knows that in sixteen years or so, he will have to pay to get rid of her. Even Greeks who have lived for years in America, will come back to Greece to find a bride, and they expect to get a good *dot* along with her. These 'Americans' generally go to their own villages to look for a wife, because there their own families can vouch for the domestic virtues and respectability of the girl in question. The eligible ones are brought out for inspection, and have very little to say in the transaction. They must just be thankful for getting a husband. Incidentally, by Greek law, if the husband can prove that his wife was not a virgin when he married her, he can send her packing back to her

## EAST OF ATHENS

parents Now, however, more and more young men, particularly in the cities, are marrying the girls of their choice, even if they have no dowry And, what is more, they will even go off on their honeymoons without looking too deeply into the virginity question

Later in the evening when it became cooler, M and I strolled along to the club, and introduced ourselves We were very hospitably received and entertained by the male members during our stay We saw hardly anything of the females, however We heard long afterwards, to our great amusement, that the ladies of Famagusta had not been able to bring themselves to call on us because we were staying at the 'wrong' hotel The 'right' hotel was the one starred in *Baedeker*, and in which we heard on good local authority, the drains were wrong There is a most amusing hotel snobbery in Cyprus In each of the five towns Nicosia, Famagusta, Limassol, Larnaca, and Paphos, there is an hotel starred by the estimable Baron, sometime before the War It does not matter that in four, at any rate, of these towns, there are now cleaner and more preferable hotels Woe betide the person who stays at them, they are just no class at all It is useless to point out their superior advantages One is simply met by the retort that "these are *native* hotels". Unregarded is the fact that the other *Baedeker* starred hotels are equally run by natives, albeit English-speaking ones

But this was one merely very small snobbery in a place where, like, I suppose, all small English colonies, such cans and can't abound I am quite sure that we broke most of the current conventions without worrying overmuch For one thing we lived in an old

Turkish house, which we had renovated. It was very picturesque and equally inconvenient. But the beauty of the little cobbled courtyard, with its arches leading into a walled garden full of fruit trees and rose bushes, far outweighed the inconvenience of oil lamps and primitive sanitation.

Once we had closed the great nail-studded door, whose key was so large that it would fit into neither pocket nor bag, but required a small boy to carry it, and shut out the hot and dusty street, we were in a hidden world. A microcosm overlooked by nobody but the birds, pecking at the ripe apricots overhead. There were people who liked our house. But there were others, I know, who sniffed, thinking it merely an eccentricity on our part and 'not quite the thing' for English people to live in a native house. In Nicosia, however, where there are plenty of fine old Turkish houses, there are a few who do so. But the passer-by, unless he knows someone who lives in one of these houses, or catches a glimpse through an open doorway, never has a chance of seeing them.

They do nothing to beautify the city, presenting often only a blank featureless wall to the street. But at least, if they are not beautiful, they are not ugly, as so many of the new houses, especially in the suburbs of Nicosia are. These new houses are nearly all built of a disagreeable, orange-coloured sandstone. They have a peculiarly raw appearance which the scarcity of trees does not help to relieve.

The British have planted a lot of trees just round Nicosia itself, mostly eucalyptus; and along the roads which cross the Mesaoria—the big central plain, but

## EAST OF ATHENS

they do little to cover the dusty bareness of the country. And yet, before the Turkish occupation, all this land was covered with dense forest, which was gradually cut down for ship building and firewood, and never replanted. So in a few centuries, the whole character of the land, as in so many Mediterranean countries, has completely changed. In Italy, or Sicily, or Provence, where olive has succeeded ilex, and vine, olive, one searches for the elms, oaks, and poplars of Theocritus, and finds what? Probably the prickly pear. So too, in Cyprus, save for the struggling trees along the roads, and the gnarled wild olives scattered sparsely on the slopes of the hills, the only relief to the eye, is the groups of tall, feathery eucalyptus which grow where the low, flat, mud brick villages scarcely break the surface of the plain.

And yet the Mesaoria can be beautiful, in its own uncompromising way. Especially is this so in the early Spring, when the pale green of the young barley, growing wherever there are a few inches of ploughable soil, makes a patchwork quilt with the reds, greys and browns of the earth, when the fat cumuli hanging over the Kyrenia mountains throw fantastic purple shadow over the rolling foothills, and the snow still gleams on Mount Troodos.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NICOSIA, KYRENIA

PACKED inside the immense circular walls of earth-lined stone, and a deep, wide moat, where now trees and gardens grow, the streets of Nicosia are like the spokes of a wheel. From these spokes radiate scores of minor offshoots, so that the effect is most confusing, nothing seeming to lead straight to anywhere. The streets themselves are very narrow, and full of bicycles and ancient one-horse carriages. There are few shops in the European sense, but the main streets are lined with booths, more in the nature of an eastern bazaar. Here cobblers, tailors, and tinsmiths sit working, cramped up among their goods. The tinsmiths do a roaring trade, making every conceivable object mostly out of five gallon 'Shell' petrol tins. The tins themselves, fitted with a handle, are, alas, used all over the island in place of the more picturesque amphoræ. These latter, however, are used for bringing in the drinking water from the country. Carts fitted with holes cut to fit twenty-one amphoræ form one of the sights of the town.

The copper workers have a street to themselves, where the racket is indescribable and where some really beautiful beaten brass and copper goods are made. Further along are the mill stones; for the peasants still grind their corn by hand. And hanging everywhere in

## EAST OF ATHENS

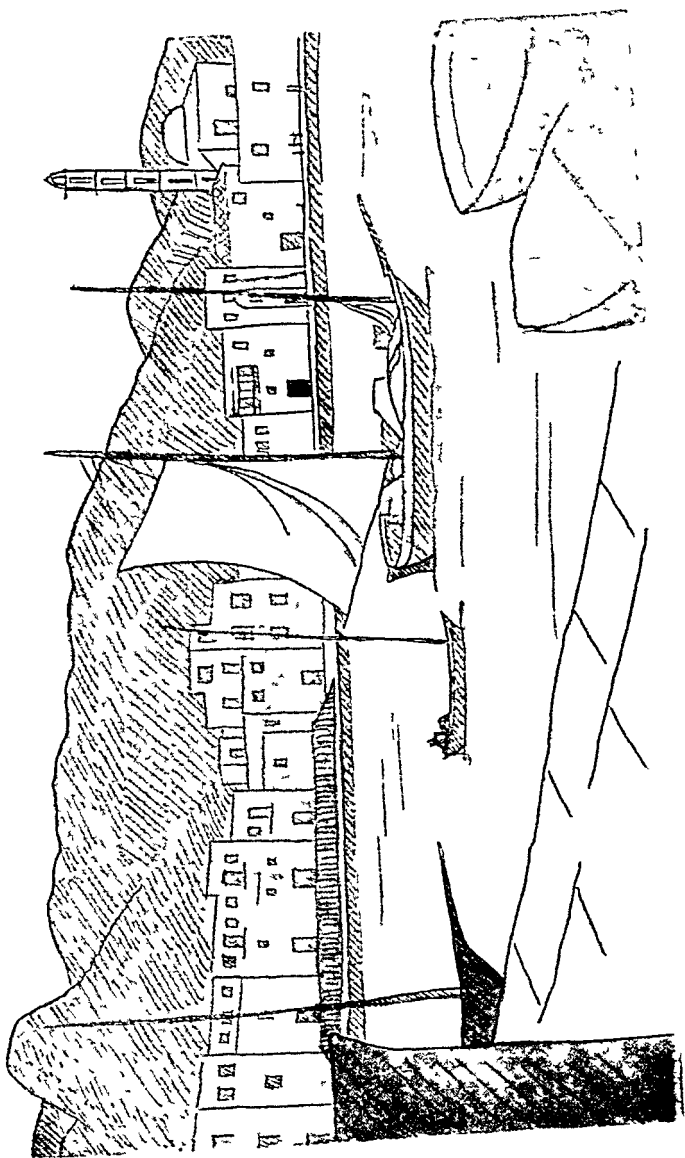
big clusters, are the top boots which the Cypriot wears below his enormous pleated breeches of black cloth

Tucked away out of sight is the Gothic church of Saint Sophia. Another large medieval cathedral, turned mosque, it is not so fine as the one in Famagusta. Both its towers have been broken off short, and are now each surmounted by a slender minaret. Inside, the walls and the double row of pillars have been white-washed, and a *mirhab* cut into one of the walls. Matting and carpets in glowing colours cover the pavement, which was relaid when the cathedral became a mosque, the old pavement being taken up for the pious purpose of removing the bodies of Christians who were buried beneath it. A fountain for performing the *woodoo* has been built in the open space in front of the porch (one of the finest in the Levant). Above the former sacristy, was apparently the cathedral treasury, if one can judge by the built-in stone cupboards, which line the walls.

In St. Sophia the Lusignians were crowned kings of Cyprus, though in St. Nicholas Famagusta they were crowned kings of Jerusalem and Armenia. They have left more traces in Cyprus than any other race. Famagusta was their city. And here, among the shattered Gothic arches, and crumbling staircases, one can still visualize the pomp and colour of the Middle Ages.

Here the religious processions, tournaments, and *autos-da-fé* brought their attendant crowd of priests and nobles.

Near Kerynia, too, among the mountains which form the northern rampart of the island, they have left two of their most characteristic legacies—the castle of St.



KYRENIA HARBOUR

## NICOSIA, KYRENIA

Hilarion, or Dieu d'Amour and the abbey of Bella Paese.

Perched dizzily against the sky, the vast walls and towers of St. Hilarion form a jagged pattern, scarcely distinguishable from the outline of the hills themselves. More than two thousand feet above the sea, even in mid-summer, the air strikes cool (how welcomingly cool after the long climb up the steep goat-paths).

The first time I visited it I missed my way and found myself clinging to an almost precipitous cliff face. When I turned round the ground seemed to drop away dizzily below me. I seemed almost to hang over the grey green olives on the plain far below.

I have no head for heights, and the upward and downward paths, which would probably have provided an afternoon's stroll for an Alpine climber, filled me with equal alarm. A group of peasants called out, presumably instructions, from away below, but they were too far for me to be able to hear what they were saying. So until the guardian of the castle, roused by their cries, appeared on the farther slope and shouted instructions to guide me upward, I remained spread-eagled on the face of the cliff.

It was to St. Hilarion that the Lusignian court migrated in the summer months from the heat and pestilence of the plains.

Here, in the cool mountain air, jousts and tourneys were held on the long level meadow below the walls of the castle. Minstrels, presumably, sang, and the queen watched from her tower—at least one is shown her tower, and so the story runs.

The castle encircles the highest peak of the mountain,



## EAST OF ATHENS

the land dropping sheerly away from the ramparts on three sides. One climbs by tortuous stairways past the remains of halls and towers, with fern and wild anemones growing between the crumbling stones.

The north side of the castle, looking out to the sea, is ice cold and vaultlike even in midsummer. At length one reaches the top—the top of the castle that is to say, for a further spur of broken boulders and dwarf pines still rises above. Below, east, west, north and south, Cyprus stretches out like a vividly coloured relief map, the coast lands grey and green, and the Mesaoria brilliant in shades of red and brown.

A few miles to the east another castle rises sharply against the skyline. And below it, almost hidden against the hillside, the monastery of Bella Paese looks down on the orchards and cypresses of a fruitful country side, and across sixty miles of vivid sea to the far Anatolian mountains.

Here, in the most beautiful building in Cyprus, if not in the whole of the Near East, the monks kept up an almost royal state, vying with the kings in the magnificence of their entertainments.

Church, refectory, and chapter-house are roofless, but otherwise almost intact. Their delicate covering of ferns and lichens hardly veils the soft colouring of the worn stones.

Standing on a levelled shelf of the hillside, on the outer face the foundations drop down cliff-like into the valley. Looking through the glassless windows, one seems to be hanging suspended above the tree tops. The only jarring note is struck by an ugly campanile, which the Greeks have added in recent years. Glaringly

## NICOSIA, KYRENIA

white and ungraceful, it seems even more incongruous than the minarets which crown the amputated towers of St. Nicholas in Famagusta, and St. Sophia of Nicosia.

In some ways the most interesting buildings of Nicosia are the two k'hans. These even now, can give one a glimpse back into the oriental life of the town. The Beyuk or Great K'han is the larger. Here, round the little octagonal mosque, which stands in the centre of the roughly paved courtyard, Greek peasants, with their top boots and voluminous black breeches, embroidered waistcoats and black head scarves, jostle be-tar-bushed Turks, camels, laden donkeys, sheep and goats; while hens flutter and cluck underfoot. All around the courtyard are stables for the animals. A staircase leads to an arcaded gallery above and off this are more stables for their masters. The other k'han is more squalid, but to compensate for this it rejoices in the name of the Kinmakela, or K'han of the Wandering Musicians. Here, for a tiny sum, the peasants can find stabling for man and beast. The k'han shows the Cypriot peasant at his most typically oriental, for oriental he definitely is in life and thought.

Nicosia gives the impression of being predominantly a Turkish town, which it is neither in point of actual population, or construction. The population is mainly Cypriot Greek, and the lay out and ramparts of the town are Venetian. In Cyprus the Turks form only about a fifth of the inhabitants. They have, however, about as much, or more, influence than the other four-fifths, as the English officials are largely pro-Turk. For some reason it is considered chic to prefer the

## EAST OF ATHENS

Turks to the Greeks. Also there is the good political reason that the Greeks are always agitating to be united to Greece, whereas the Turks prefer the *status quo*.

The Legislative Council of Cyprus has twenty-four members—twelve Greeks and three Moslems, who are chosen by election, and nine English members who are appointed by the Governor from among the senior clerks in his office. The Turks generally vote against their ancient enemies—the Greeks. So as the casting vote goes to the Governor, England has been able to give Cyprus representative government, with a comfortable feeling of security.

The old Ottoman laws, now obsolete in Turkey itself, are, strange anachronism, still in force in Cyprus. The complicated system of land tenure and inheritance, by which property cannot be willed away, is constantly the subject of petitions and memorandums from the British non-official population. But the British officials are not really interested, and the Turkish members of the council always succeed in blocking any reform measures.

There is a distinct coolness between the official and unofficial British residents in Cyprus. British settlers, whether coming as colonists or merely as winter residents, are definitely not encouraged. One might almost say they are discouraged. However, in spite of this, we generally found the officials we met agreeable enough. Of course, living in Kyrenia, where the British population, with the exception of the District Commissioner, was exclusively unofficial, we did not come much in touch with them save in the Nicosia and Famagusta clubs, or at one of the occasional bun fights of a Government House reception.

## NICOSIA, KYRENIA

In Cyprus a great deal of social etiquette is observed. As soon as we had taken a house, we were inundated by all the glove-wearing, card-leaving ladies of the district—with one exception that is. After we had returned all the calls, and duly been invited to tea, we kept being asked: "Have you called on Lady Motley yet?" We said, No, who was Lady Motley, and how was it that she hadn't called on us the same as everyone else? "Oh, but she wouldn't call on you. She's the wife of Sir Mervyn Motley. She owns that enormous house down by the harbour. She's spending thousands doing it up. Do you know they chartered a whole ship to bring their furniture from France." That seemed to settle it; but we made a mutual vow that nothing would induce us to call on Lady Motley.

Of course it wasn't very long before we met her. A middle-aged woman of somewhat heavy build. She wore her fair hair bound in plaits above a square, pallid face, which gave her rather the appearance of a Roman emperor, laurel crowned.

"How is it I haven't met you before?" she demanded. M. smiled sweetly. "I've been expecting you to call on me," she answered. Lady Motley drew herself up with a flashing of diamonds. "I never call on anybody," she announced pontifically. However, perhaps to show that there was no ill feeling, she shortly after invited us to a luncheon party, and we found on closer acquaintance that she could be very jolly on those occasions when she was willing to relax her dignity.

Most of the people in Kyrenia had quarrelled with most of the other people at one time or another, which made things rather difficult, and it was impossible

## EAST OF ATHENS

always to know who was temporarily not on speaking terms with whom. As they quarrelled and made it up with the rapidity with which lovers are credited, it didn't do to take sides. A sympathizer was likely to find that the protagonists had made it up over night, and were now prepared to turn their combined forces on—generally her.

We avoided feuds as much as possible, and when we gave a house-warming party invited everyone we knew, regardless of their quarrels, past, present and hatching, confident that our house and garden were large enough for enemies to avoid one another. Apparently they were, for although all but about two of the people invited turned up, everything passed off peacefully.

It was not very long after this that a retired couple who had built a large house outside Kyrenia went in to monastic seclusion. They had been famous for the delicious teas with which they regaled visitors, if not for the wit with which they seasoned them. An indiscreet young man remarked publicly one day "After all, people only go to the Deadlies' for what they get to eat." Naturally the remark was born with wings, which carried it rapidly in the direction least desired. Thereafter the Deadlies' doors were closed. I had occasion to go round and see Mr. Deadlie on business one afternoon before I knew of this. He received me at the gate and we talked for a few minutes. Then as I turned to go, he remarked "I'm sorry I can't ask you in, but we have friends to tea." I was so taken aback that it was quite five minutes before I thought of the obvious retort. "That doesn't matter at all, Mr. Deadlie, I'm not really snobbish who I meet!" I called twice after-

## NICOSIA, KYRENIA

wards in the hopes of being able to use it, but the opportunity never occurred again.

In Famagusta, on the other hand, nearly all the British were officials. In fact, the only private residents we met were a Mr. Hawtrey, a brother of the late Sir Charles Hawtrey, and his wife, to whom we had had an introduction. The Hawtrey's farmed an orange plantation just outside the town, where they had received us very kindly on our arrival in Cyprus. Now on my second visit to Famagusta I decided to look them up again. I was out of luck, however, as they were away for the day. Instead I spent the afternoon bathing off the long sandy beach, and so to bed in my 'wrong' hotel, where I found myself to be still the only English name in the visitors' book.

## CHAPTER FOUR

LARNACA, LIMASSOL, PAPHOS

THE boat was due to leave in the early morning, so I was on board in good time, as I did not know how many deck passengers there would be. I secured one of the park benches by spreading my things out along it, and looked around. There did not seem to be many passengers, but we stopped again at Larnaca and Limassol. There were some peasant women with sacks, and bundles of hens, tied together by the legs. And a group of boys about seventeen years old who were going to London as waiters. They none of them spoke a word of English, but felt confident of getting work in the hotels.

Just recently in London I was hailed by a young Cypriot who used to work for us. He is now a waiter in the May Fair Hotel. A little later I met two others, ex-house boys of friends of ours in Cyprus. So perhaps they were not being too optimistic. These boys were going deck to Athens, fourth class on a Messageries Maritimes boat to Marseille, and third by train to London. They reckoned to do the journey on about £4 each.

Presently I wandered up to the first class, and found a deck chair in the approved manner. Next to me was a good looking, middle aged couple who started talking to me. They were French, but spoke the most perfect

## LARNACA, LIMASSOL, PAPHOS

English I have ever heard from a foreigner. Then, and during the next few days, I spent quite a lot of time in their company. They had come from Syria on holiday and were going to stay on the *Thraki* while she did a trip round the islands, before they went back to France. I heard later from one of the officers, that they were the Governor, or High Commissioner (I forget the official title) of Beyrouth, and his wife.

At Larnaca and Limassol the boat cannot dock, but has to lie out in the open roads. In rough weather, the landing in small boats can be a drenching business. We did not stay long at Larnaca a town which pictorially, and architecturally, has little to recommend it. Here live all the foreign consuls in Cyprus, which helps to give the place a slight animation. Perhaps, as ancient Kitium, it was more lively. Now, this coast is, as the guide books say, 'redolent of Biblical history'. At Paphos, the pillar to which St. Paul was bound, is still pointed out to travellers. And it was here at Larnaca that Lazarus found refuge after his resurrection and committal to the sea by the Jews of Joppa. Here he was consecrated first bishop, and eventually died for good and all. A stone sarcophagus, partly buried in the floor of a small chapel of the church of St. Lazarus, is shown as his tomb. But whether his body still lies there, or like the Thaumaturgical arm of the second St. Francis, continues to wander the world, I do not know.

Rumour has it that it was transferred to Constantinople at the end of the ninth century. Later it was once more removed to Marseille, where track of it seems to have been lost. One can only hope that it is doing good by stealth somewhere.



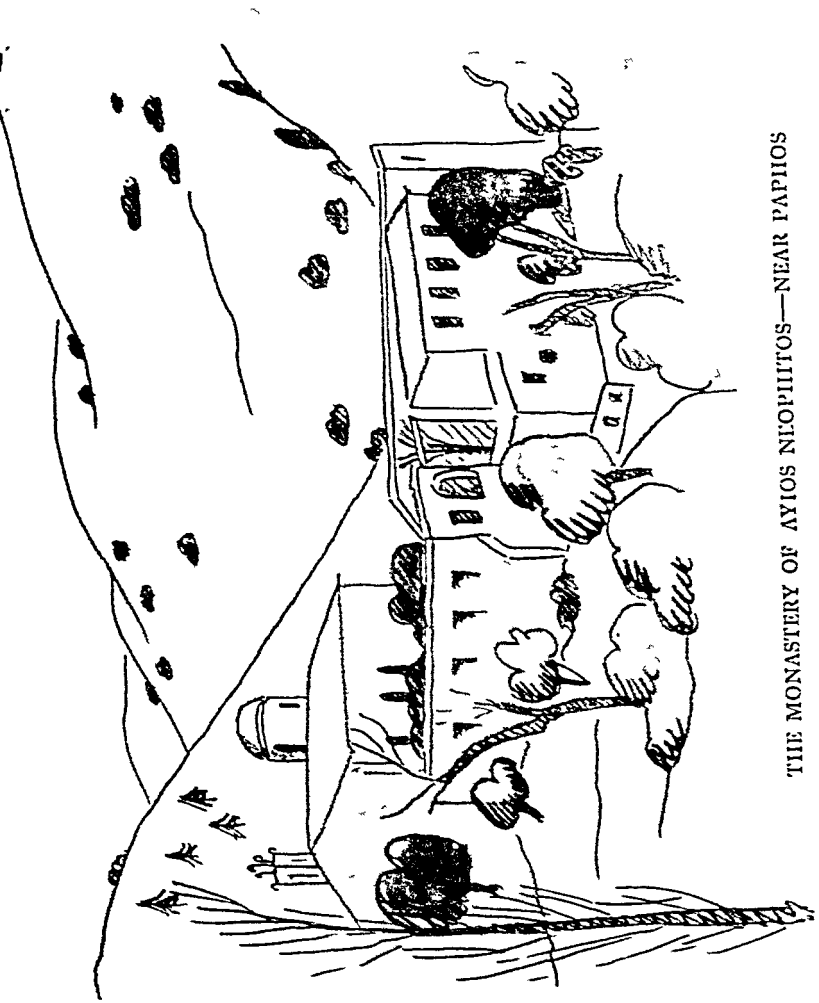
## EAST OF ATHENS

At Limassol, we spent over two hours, as we had a lot of passengers to come aboard. Also there was a large cargo of mules, which had to be lifted out of barges by the derrick. Struggling and kicking, they were loaded into the hold, among the crates of hens, and turkeys, and baby pigs, which were already in possession.

Limassol is a town which looks best from the sea. The white minarets rising from among the trees, give it a spurious air of romance, which is quickly dissipated on landing. A long, dusty waterfront is the façade to a dusty, uninteresting town. In summer the damp heat is almost as oppressive as in Port Said, which is saying quite a lot.

Limassol will always be associated in my mind with a very pretty Greek girl whom I met on the boat coming from Egypt. She was joining a cabaret troupe there, and kept her hand in on the journey by flirting outrageously with a young air force officer and me. We sat, one on either side of her, learning such useful Greek phrases as "I love you," "Do you love me?" "Have you a double room, and what time does the performance begin?" On this trip, however, no sirens came on board. Beyond some peasants, the only new arrival was a very tall, burly man who came up to me and asked if I was English. "I am a Swamishman," he announced, information which left me completely in the dark. I felt that my geography was not quite up to standard, until, taking pity on my blank face, he explained that he meant a Finn. I have yet to meet a second Swamushman, but I won't be caught out a second time.

He spoke quite good English, and for a while we stood chatting and watching the cargo being shipped.



THE MONASTERY OF AYIOS NEOPHYTOS—NEAR PAPHOS

eventually the last struggling mule was heaved on board. The last seller of grapes, or chocolate, or picture post cards was chivvied down the ladder; and we got under way again, sliding gently through the clear, still water, past a coast mottled red and grey green by earth and olive trees.

We did not stop at Paphos, but passed it, away in the distance, on our starboard bow. Of the Paphos of classical antiquity scarcely anything remains. There are a few ruined walls, and the broken columns of the famous temple of Aphrodite still rear themselves towards the sea. The phallic emblem of the Goddess has been taken to Nicosia, where it is stuck away unlabelled in a corner of the museum gardens!

The modern town of Ktima-Paphos lies about a mile inland on a slight hill. At the port there are only some dozen buildings, a Greek church, and St. Paul's pillar. Between there and the town the road runs among cornfields and gardens, with occasional white-washed Turkish houses. The modern town is quite charming, with lovely views over valley and sea. It stands on the edge of a small plateau, which drops abruptly on the coast side of the town, and inland stretches for three or four miles to a low range of hills. To the east, lining the edge of the plateau and looking down abruptly on the orchards and cornfields and the blue line of the sea are private houses and gardens, among them the rambling white house of the hospitable District Commissioner, Mr. Browne. Strong glasses would probably have discovered him riding along the shore with his wife and daughter, as we sailed away into the gathering twilight.

As soon as it became dark, deck passengers began to

## EAST OF ATHENS

spread out their rugs, and in some cases mattresses, in sheltered corners. No one had moved my belongings from the bench. I thought I had better stand guard until everyone was settled however, as though I had a rug, I had no mattress and did not want to have to sleep on the bare deck. I decided suddenly that I was very hungry, and rooted out my bags of food. It is a trite truism, how good even the plainest fare can taste, given the right occasion. That night bread and oily black olives, followed by a bunch of grapes could not have been enjoyed more, had they been the best dinner money could provide. When it got quite dark one of the Cypriot boys produced a guitar. The rest all gathered around the player, to sing Greek songs, varying from the ubiquitous *σ α γ γ ε ρ ο* to other more bawdy efforts, many of which were beyond my limited Greek. I remember though, that one described how the singer intended to marry a fat wife, so that in time of drought he would not go thirsty! Most of the other passengers eventually collected around the singers, applauding vigorously.

But their most enthusiastic audience was two large middle aged German women, who had gone determinedly Greek. Ancient Greek, that is to say, for they wore pseudo classical white robes, edged with key pattern, open sandals on their bare feet, and their fading blonde hair was done in low chignons. They also wore quantities of silver chains, bangles and vaguely Celtic brooches, which did not seem quite in keeping. They spoke fluent Greek, joining in the choruses of the songs, suggesting new ones and swapping stories with the boys and the peasant women. When, at last, the

## LARNACA, LIMASSOL, PAPHOS

guitarist grew tired, I wandered up into the bows, treading my way carefully among the figures curled up all over the deck. It was a dead still night. Only the passage of the ship made a faint breeze, and even right in the bows, there was scarcely any motion. The water shone phosphorescently as it broke against the ship, and overhead the moon lay on her back like a golden boat. I remembered Flecker's lines:

"A ship, an isle, a sickle moon—  
With few but with how splendid stars  
The mirrors of the sea are strewn  
Between their silver bars."

Eight bells—midnight—roused me abruptly. I went back to my bench, suddenly afraid in case I should have lost it by being so long away. There is an art about sleeping comfortably on a park bench. On the round shaped ones, made up of a series of little slats, the best way is to put one hip and shoulder well forward to the edge of the seat, and the other hip and shoulder against the back, so that the sleeper is diagonally across the curve of the bench. Then, with a roll of something soft on the arm to act as a pillow, I have known worse beds. Anyhow, this time, once I was rolled in my rug, and wedged in the required position, I did not stir until the patter of the sailors' bare feet woke me in the first pale dawn. I will not say that I was not a bit stiff, but I had not had a bad night.

It was another brilliant day, but with a slight freshening of wind which made us pitch gently. We were out of sight of land now. The Anatolian coast was still too far north to be seen. But the red and white sails of

## EAST OF ATHENS

fishing boats in the distance showed us that we were not too isolated

The washing arrangements for the deck passengers were almost non-existent. Down below, there was merely a tap over a grating, where we stripped and scrubbed ourselves in turn, as best we could. The sanitary arrangements were quite indescribable, and had better be passed over as quickly as one got out of the privy.

Bread and olives did not taste quite so good for breakfast, even with a raw onion to help them down. But little cups of thick, sweet Turkish coffee brought from the galley by a filthy small boy, helped matters a bit. A lot of people breakfasted off large plates of macaroni, which looked most indigestible. It apparently was, for in a few minutes they were all violently sick, which put me off macaroni for quite a long while.

One of the young Cypriots, who was going to stay over some days in Athens, was very anxious that I should share a room with him there. I was not so enthusiastic and privately determined to shake him off at the dock if possible. He was a good looking boy and seemed quite clean. Still I did not want him as a permanent institution, for he clung to me most determinedly, regardless of whether I wanted to read or talk to someone else. I had not yet had enough experience of the Cypriot type who cannot understand that his presence or conversation can never be unwelcome, to be as brutally blunt as I should have been a year or two later. As it was, my tactful attempts at shaking off were completely wasted. I am quite sure now, that they were equally completely unnoticed. The day passed un-

## LARNACA, LIMASSOL, PAPHOS

eventfully, talking, reading, dozing and gazing out to the sea, which was beginning to take on more and more opalescent hues; a shimmering carpet of blues and purples, speckled with gold where the sun caught the tips of the tiny ripples. We were entering the Aegean now, and to-morrow morning we would be anchored off Rhodes, fabulous city of legend and romance, where Christian had dominated Saracen, and Turk, Christian, and now Italy ruled over the heterogeneous survivors of that chequered past. I rolled myself up contentedly in my rug, and fixing myself securely across the bench, lay gazing up at the stars, which seemed to swing gently across the sky with the rolling of the ship; and presently fell asleep.

When I woke it was already day, and we lay quite motionless at anchor. Facing me over the starboard rail, the mountains of Asia Minor caught, and threw back, the early morning light, as if they were fashioned from some opaque, coloured glass. Each contour, each moulding and fluting, was a sharply defined light and shade. I got up, still spellbound, and walked to the other side of the ship. There Rhodes lay with the morning sun turning the walls and minarets to clear gold. I felt a lump in my throat, and my eyes swam at the sight of so much beauty.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RHODES

NO other part of the Mediterranean has the jewel-like colouring and sparkling clarity of outline of the Aegean

The islands ride, clear-cut miracles of form and colour, on the shot silk of the water. The wine-dark sea of antiquity is no myth. Grape purple, hyacinth and sapphire, the eye never wearies of its shifting brilliance. And like a captain jewel among lesser stones, Rhodes shines, fantastically improbable as the setting for a Max Rheinhardt spectacle.

Battlemented walls, gleaming white minarets and rosy campanili swim in a girdle of green. One expects soft music, vaguely oriental, though not too obvious. Perhaps Delius's *Hassan* music would do. However, the strains which greet one on landing are much more likely to be martial, for Rhodes swarms with Italian troops and the waterfront is the setting for competently stage managed military displays on every possible occasion.

The motor launch which carried us to the shore seemed oddly out of place. As we were not staying in Rhodes, we were landed on the tree lined promenade of the new town. Beside us rose the neo-Venetian cathedral, its warm pinkish stone a perfect foil for the surrounding blue. Beyond, the arched colonnades of the



## RHODES

government buildings opened on to the water. These, and in fact the whole layout of the new town, was done under the supervision of Don Mario Lago, the Governor. Before his governorship, Don Mario was a prominent art critic. Probably the first art critic to become a colonial governor, his appointment showed a happy lack of red tape on the part of the Italian Government.

In this case their courage has been rewarded, for to Don Mario must go the credit for the fact that the new Rhodes blends so harmoniously with the old.

Facing me as I landed was a two-storied, white-washed building with round, cool arches. From a tree-shaded terrace, little tables with gay cloths, spilled out on to the wide roadway: This was cheerfully hailed as a pleasant *café* by all strangers, but turned out to be the Italian Club. I was later to become a member, and still look back with pleasure on its friendliness and charm.

Just as I was stepping out briskly along the promenade, a gun boomed. I didn't pay much heed. Then I found that I was the only person moving. Everyone was standing to attention, and my unheeding footsteps echoed loudly in the stillness. They all stared at me. In embarrassment, I slowed down and eventually also stood to attention, wondering what was going to happen next. For a few moments we all stood looking at one another. Then the gun boomed again, everybody relaxed and life went on once more. Puzzled, I inquired from the man next to me what it was all about. Saluting the flag, I was told. Every morning when the flag is being hoisted on the government buildings, and every evening when it is lowered the gun is fired, and everyone

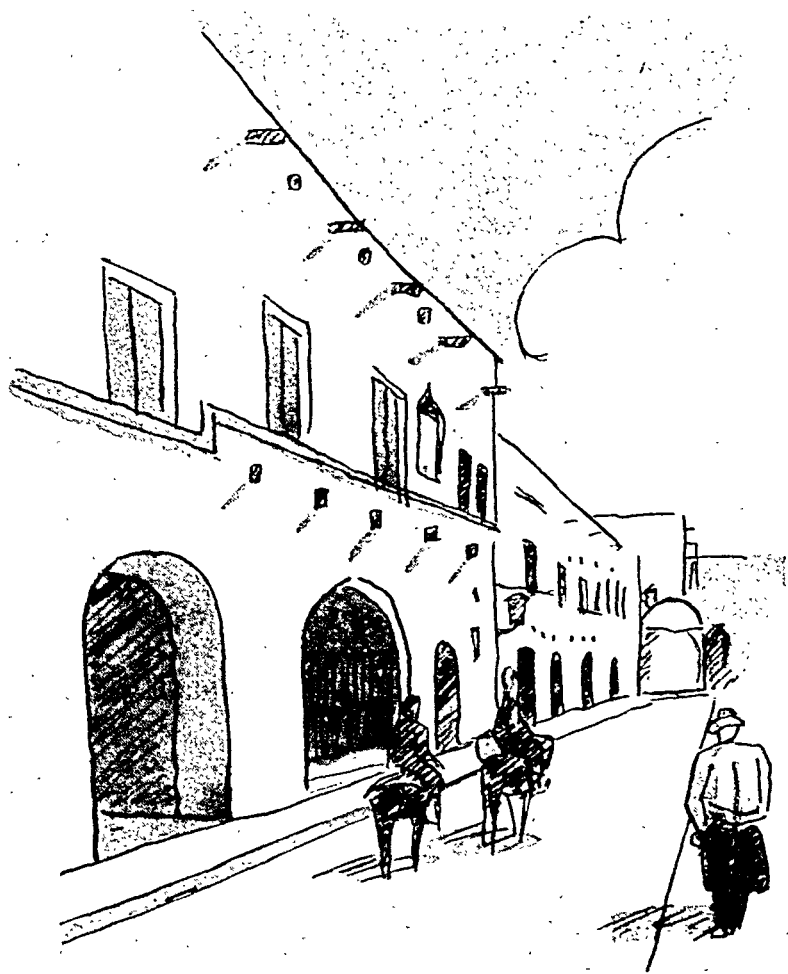
## EAST OF ATHENS

must stand to attention This applies, he added, in all the Italian colonies

Supposing that I ought to be thankful not to have been arrested for *lese majesté*, I looked round to get my bearings Ahead of me rose the grey battlements of the old town, above a belt of trees This seemed the most obvious way to go I wandered along, glancing on my way into the great shop-lined market square This also was tree shaded, there are trees and flowers everywhere in Rhodes As I passed, a stout, bearded man with a tray of Bibles, pushed one under my startled nose We came to know him well by appearance later, for he made desperate efforts to scrape acquaintance with M, bowing and smiling and raising his hat whenever she appeared, only to receive an icier stare each time

I left him waving the Bible, and presently came to a stone bridge which led me over a wide, grass grown moat, in which deer were feeding, and through an arch in the thickness of the town wall In front of me was an open place edged with old, grey buildings Hedges of scarlet hibiscus clashed riotously with swirling masses of purple bourgainvillea A second arch led me on into another smaller square, where in a building on my right a potter was sitting at his wheel, with around him, samples of the brilliantly coloured, elaborately patterned work for which Rhodes is famous

On and on I wandered, nobody paying any attention to me They are tourist hardened in Rhodes, unfortunately I discovered the central square, where venerable Turks, in red tarbushes, propped themselves against the tiled fountain, like figures in a *tableau vivant* I climbed the *Via dei Cavalieri*, the street of the



VIA DEI CAVALLIERI  
RHODES

## RHODES

Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. Many of their hostels still stand, their cool arched patios and secret gardens, their charm learnt through long sojournings in the East, scarcely altered through the centuries.

In the Turkish quarter I found the domed bath-houses, and the mosques whose minarets I had seen from the ship. Here the streets are only just wide enough for two people to pass. The houses are buttressed with little stone arches across the street, to guard against the occasional slight earthquake shocks. The town, I discovered, was divided into four districts: Turkish, Jewish, Greek, and Italian. The Turkish and Jewish quarters are inside the walls. There, until after the Italian occupation no Christian was allowed to live. The Italians and Greeks live mostly in the new town, where the districts are not so distinctly separated. All the same, each race tends to 'keep itself to itself'. The Jews are descendants of those who fled from the persecution of the Spanish Inquisition. They still speak their sixteenth-century Spanish, keep their own customs and appear to live fairly contentedly under Italian rule. This is more than can be said for the Greeks. The majority of these grumble continually against Italy, as in Cyprus they do against England. The two islands are linked together in the Greek mind since Venezilos persuaded the Italians to sign a treaty by which they agreed to return Rhodes to Greece if a plebiscite so decided—the plebiscite to be held fifteen years after the English have given back Cyprus! Although there has never been any formal annexation, as in the case of Abyssinia, I wouldn't give very much for the Greeks' chances. In Rhodes, as in Cyprus, they form the bulk

## EAST OF ATHENS

of the population, considerably outnumbering the Turks and Jews. The Italians are mostly officials, and officers and their families, and a certain number of shopkeeping colonists. There is also, of course, a fairly large garrison.

The Greek population is, I believe, being ousted from some of the smaller islands of the Dodecanese, notably from Leros. This island has a landlocked harbour which the Italians are fortifying as a naval base. I never landed there, but only lay for about an hour in the harbour, so had little chance of judging for myself. From the boat there seemed very little sign of activity among the couple of dozen buildings which lined the shore.

The bay is completely landlocked by low bare hills. It is not nearly so large, however, as the lovely harbour at Patmos, whose clear green water looked capable of containing the whole British fleet. The Greek papers, about this time, were constantly reporting riots in Leros and Kalymnos. When I visited the latter island, it too, seemed peaceful enough. Only the pale blue and white of the tiers of houses, stuck against the bare hillside of its semicircular bay, dumbly proclaimed its Greek nationalism.

Even in mid-winter, if one is lucky, it is possible to sail through the Aegean in perfect weather. It was early January when I visited Simi, Kos, Leros, Kalymnos and Patmos, yet the pale blue sky was cloudless and the sea like glass. The sun too, was considerably hotter than during an average English summer. Of course, there is always the chance of one of those fierce squalls which sweep up suddenly from Asia Minor. These

## RHODES

play havoc along this dangerous coast, with its jutting headlands and myriads of tiny islands.

Just before I sailed, one of the worst of these storms struck Rhodes. During one night the wind ripped every tile from the roof of the cathedral. It smashed the trees along the promenade, and cut a wide avenue of destruction through the centre of the town. The next morning we awoke to a clear blue day and a scene of complete devastation.

Storms of this magnitude, naturally, are rare. Sudden squalls of wind, however, often arise, which are a danger to small shipping. Rhodes, on this summer morning, looked as if such things as storms did not exist. *The sky was brilliant, and the sun lit the ancient stones to a warm pinkish gold.*

I wandered on through the Turkish quarter, where every now and again some flaming creeper would thrust itself over the high wall of a hidden garden. I believe on this walk I passed the house which we were later to rent for a few months. Like most of the others it presented only a high wall and a door to the street. On the door was pinned a slip of paper on which was written: To Let. Enquire, such and such an address. When the door was opened it revealed a large courtyard paved in a kind of mosaic of black and white pebbles, arranged in elaborate patterns. Overhead was a roof of vines, laden with purple grapes, and beyond lay a garden full of orange and lemon trees.

The effect was enchanting, but we soon decided that the house was much too large. There were three stories of enormous rooms (one of them was more than forty feet long), another larger garden at the back, three

## EAST OF ATHENS

kitchens, one of them immense, with a fire place where the customary ox could have been roasted without difficulty, a bathroom of sorts, running water, and electric light all over the house

"It's very nice," I said, "but it's much too big for two people" "Never mind," said the owner "Why don't you shut up what you don't want, and use the rest" "Anyhow, it's probably too dear, we don't need a house this size How much is it a month?" I asked "One hundred and twenty lire!" I looked at M Two guineas a month didn't seem excessive We couldn't get the smallest apartment in the new town for that price "What about it?" I said M nodded, and so the bargain was closed

We moved in the next day with two mattresses and a saucepan, which looked rather lost in the immensity of our new dwelling We were in luck, however, for the cellars disclosed a heterogeneous collection of furniture, which a little soap and water and a coat of paint made quite presentable Our house possessed a high tower from which we had a superb view over the whole of Rhodes Otherwise from the lower rooms our view was confined to the garden, enclosed by twenty foot walls These walls were the cause of trouble one evening when we returned to find that the hall door had jammed I made the round of all the neighbouring houses to see if there was any entrance to be found from their gardens, but without success

Eventually someone produced a long ladder, but even this was not high enough A man climbed to the top of it, and another on his shoulders, who was just able to seize the top of the wall He held on to this,

## RHODES

while a boy climbed over both of them and on to the wall. From there the descent into the garden was easy, and in a few moments he opened the door. By this time, of course, the whole neighbourhood had collected to watch the fun. The narrow street was packed with women and children, who swarmed into the courtyard as soon as the door was opened. They sat around on the parapet, exclaiming and gossiping and evidently prepared to spend the evening, until the boy who had scaled the wall took it upon himself to chase them away with loud cries and vigorous thumps.

Now as I passed, similar women stuck veiled faces out of archways to stare at me. The streets wound tortuously, and every now and again in stepping aside to avoid a herd of goats or the laden panniers of a donkey, I took a different turning to the one I had intended and at last became hopelessly confused. However, I eventually reached the other side of the town. Here there was a double barrier of walls and moats. Through the *Porta di San Giovanni* a narrow bridge led over the deep, over-grown moat once more into the new town. Beyond a belt of trees was the stadium, a large barracks, and the motor road to the springs of Calitea.

Little known in western Europe, here in the summer months flock the local rheumatoid and livery. From Italy, Egypt, Lybia and from all over the Near East they come. Italian officers and their wives, Egyptians, colonial officials, incredibly emaciated or grotesquely fat. They all have lemon-yellow skins, the womens' concealed beneath thick layers of paint. It is a collection of Goya caricatures come to life.

The waters are advertised as diuretic and aperient.



## EAST OF ATHENS

To judge by the number of what the Americans, with ponderous euphemism, call 'comfort stations', they must be as advertised

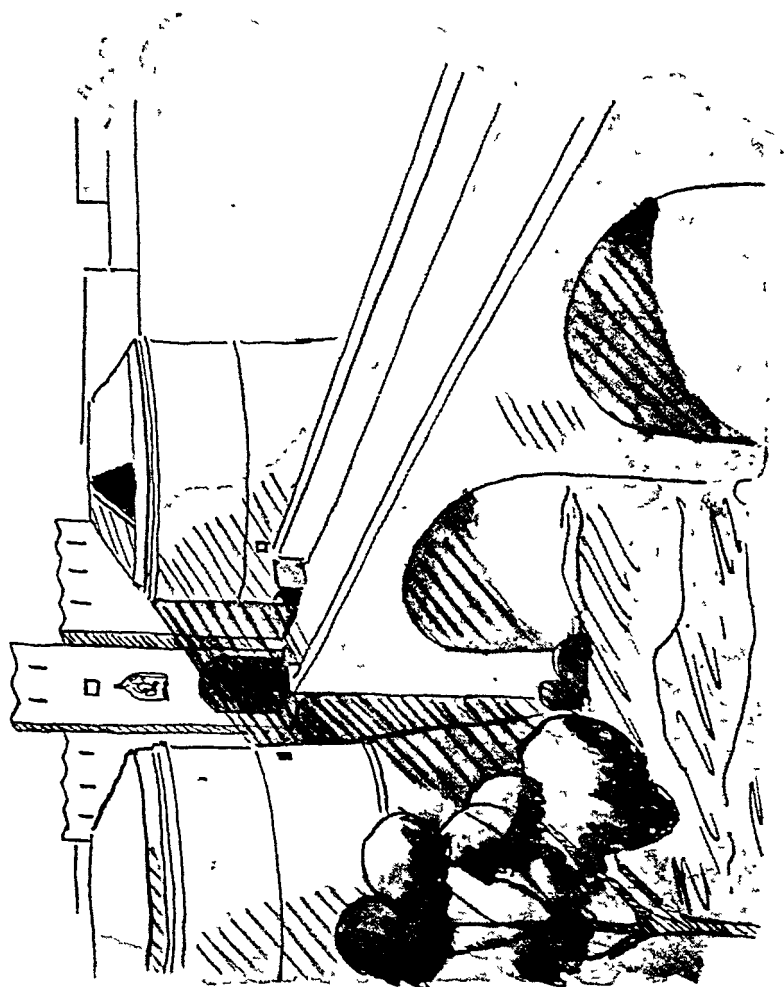
The cure ended, the caricatures begin to look more human. Their congested and distended livers are relieved of the year's burden. They smile, and even laugh at the new grotesques who have succeeded them.

I went out twice to visit Calitea. As a spectator, I might add, in parenthesis. Watching the victims, I felt like the complacent spectator of some endurance contest.

Ten glasses from this grotto, taken hot, nine glasses from the next one, cold. Then so many glasses of something else. I know I should have been sick before half the prescribed dose was down.

Anyhow, the victims have an agreeable place to suffer in pergolas and grottoes where they may sit and sip, and garden paths where they may stroll. Stroll, that is, until the diuretic and aperient causes them to bolt for that one of the row of doors, marked respectively *Terza classe*, *Seconda classe*, and *Di Lusso*, to which their ticket entitles them. M., who took the cure, was very superior, and bought a *Di Lusso* ticket. (She generally contrived to be nearer the *Seconda* or even the *Terza classe* in an emergency.) All this, naturally, leads to a certain camaraderie among the victims. Temporarily uninhibited, they discuss their bowels and bladders with an almost Rabelaisian freedom. Incidentally, they think nothing of stopping the bus back to Rhodes half a dozen times on its journey to hop out, women on one side, and men on the other.

But at this time Calitea meant nothing to me. All I



PORTA D'AMBOISE—RHODES

## RHODES

saw was a road stretching away, tempting me to further exploration. As it was time to return to the ship now, I had, reluctantly, to turn back. I would have another chance on my way home, I knew, which was some consolation. I was afraid to risk going back through the town in case I should again lose my way, and perhaps miss the boat. I decided to follow the outer edge of the ramparts which encircle the whole town. It was a longer round than I had imagined. It led me past the overgrown Turkish cemetery, where the round-headed grave-stones leant towards one another at crazy angles. As I turned the corner of the ramparts into view of the sea again, I came to where gardens full of rose bushes weighed down with blossom, and tall, slender cypresses covered the whole slope of the hill. Below, stretched out a panorama of the harbour and the new town from the end of the quay where I had entered the old town a couple of hours before, to the long stretch of bathing beside the *Albergo delle Rose*. This big *de luxe* hotel, which was turned into a hospital during the Abyssinian war, is about the only really ugly building in Rhodes. It's great yellow-tiled dome looks, as my French acquaintance on the boat said, just like a gigantic butter dish.

I wandered slowly down towards the waterfront, reluctant to leave the gardens. On the way I passed the British Consulate, which I was to know so much better later. But I did not see Mr. Perkins, most amiable of consuls. One of those rare few who do not regard strange English as if they were disease germs, to be sterilized by a blast of the official manner.

By the time I got back once more to the jetty, I

## EAST OF ATHENS

found I would just have time to glance into the cathedral, which stood only a few yards away on the edge of the water. The doors were open and I stepped from the brilliance of the waterfront into a still pool of colour.

From a dull red brick floor, the light from amber-glassed windows, was thrown back on to the apricot-coloured stone of the walls. In the bright mid-morning sunshine, the whole interior of the church glowed with reddish golden light. There were no pews or chairs to mar the long sweep of the nave. And, miraculously, none of the trumpery ornamentation, which disfigures so many Roman Catholic churches. Tablets in the aisles, with bas-reliefs of the Stations of the Cross, were the only concession to imagery. A few peasant women, and two soldiers were kneeling in front of the high altar. Otherwise the church was deserted, and absolutely still. I stood for a few minutes inside the door, my eyes drunk with colour. Then I hurried back to the waiting launch. Out through the entrance which once the Colossus bestrode, we chugged, defiantly modern. An hour later, and the island home of Andragathos was no more than a blur on the horizon. Our faces were turned towards Attica.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ATHENS

THE next morning we arrived at Athens. It was broad daylight as we sailed up the coast. First we could see the factory chimneys of the Piræus; then the Parthenon, rising in the distance against its background of hills. Away to the left the island of Aegina was faintly outlined through the white haze which hung over the water. The Piræus had a drab and dusty greyness, even under such a vivid sky as hung over it that morning.

We docked beside the Customs House and I was soon through with the various formalities. Outside was a long dusty waterfront, edged with cheap shops, *cafés*, and market stalls. Trams clanged, and taxis hooted. I inquired for the station, intending to go up to Athens by train; but found it was about twenty minutes' walk. Just then a taxi-driver appeared. He offered to take me up to Athens for the equivalent of about two shillings, if I would share the taxi with a young lady. Where was the young lady? She was just finishing her lunch at the restaurant opposite. I was quite agreeable, so I got in and was driven across. Here I found that the lady had only just given her order, and expected to be at least half an hour more. I said I wasn't going to wait all that time. All right, said the driver, he'd take me up by myself. I didn't realize why, then, so off we started.

## EAST OF ATHENS

Once it leaves the Piræus, the road to Athens runs fairly straight, through a district of semi suburb Parched looking market gardens and occasional factories dot the landscape

We swerved violently from side to side of the road, past cars and lorries, and lumbering market carts, laden with country produce Every now and again we would brake suddenly for the driver to turn round and point out the sights Admirably impartial, he was prepared to extol, with equal enthusiasm, some new factory or the first view of the Akropolis

The road was lavishly scarred with immense pot holes As we crashed across them, I was thrown about inside the taxi like a rubber ball About half way we were stopped for the *octroi* officials to take a cursory look at my baggage Then again to pay the car toll between the Piræus and Athens

Very soon now we were in the city, swerving along the tramlines and hooting like mad I had given the driver the name of an hotel I had been recommended Innocently, I assumed that the one I was driven up to was the right one

Only after I had engaged my room, and the taxi driver had driven off, did I realize that it wasn't Now, in the light of the almost certain commission he got from the hotel, his willingness to take me up at a cheap rate became clear Naturally he wasn't going to bring any ignorant and unsuspecting stranger anywhere else However, as I was there, I thought I might as well make the best of it Anyhow, there probably wasn't much to choose between them At the moment, a wash and food were the most important objectives

## ATHENS

My hotel was right on the Omonia Plateia, or Place of Harmony. How misnamed I was soon to find out. The business centre of the city, it is its noisiest spot. The square is surrounded by *cafés*, which stay open all night. In the centre is a large paved space with some flower beds, and the entrance to the underground station. Illuminated columns stand at intervals; and all around, lines of trams circulate. Seven streets run into the square. These also have, most of them, tramlines!

It was midday. The heat was intense, and clouds of dust swirled along. Every description of vehicle that had a hooter, hooted incessantly. The pedestrians dashed about in front of them, or stood in groups in the middle of the street, quite regardless of the motor horns. Continually misused, they had ceased to be a warning.

Modern Greek cooking can be excellent. If you like rich food, that is, and plenty of olive oil, which I do. I soon found that it could be sampled to perfection in Athens. It owes a large debt to Turkish, but hardly anything to French, Italian, or other European cooking, except possibly the Austrian (note the popularity of Viennese pastry shops in Athens). Some of the restaurants, of course, attempt to specialize in French dishes for the visitors. Generally the wrong dish, too. That abomination *perdrix aux choux* was pressed on me in one, so called smart, restaurant.

It isn't as if this was necessary, as in Spain, where the local dishes, with the exception of the *paella*, are generally uneatable. Or in Italy, where the half-cooked *pasta* makes its sickeningly inevitable reappearance at every meal.

The Græco-Turkish dishes have an infinite and

## EAST OF ATHENS

delectable variety Not so the wines, alas Unless one has become inured to the attic retzina, that medicinal tasting resinated wine or else has a very sweet tooth, one is out of luck The dry wines are all very spiritry The famous Greek wines, such as the wine of Samos, have the sickly sweetness of Malaga \*

A taste for sweet wines is one of the few things the modern Greek has inherited from his classical ancestors. Ancestors, that is to say, if one admits that very doubtful genealogy Didn't the Spartans refuse to drink their wine when it wasn't scented with rose petals!

The heat and a heavy meal proved too much for my sightseeing intentions I was forced back to the hotel for my customary siesta. It was the best thing I could have done, as it turned out It is quite impossible, unless one is deaf, to sleep in central Athens before about three in the morning The early afternoon is the only comparatively quiet time of day or night

When I woke up it was getting a little cooler I decided that after tea I would be the good tourist and climb up to the Akropolis I could see it perched against the paling sky, at the end of a long street of stalls and booths, where everything from vegetables to shoe laces seemed to be sold

On one side of the street was a long line of bootblacks There must have been twenty or thirty of them Each had his little box in front of him, and was cleaning shoes at a halfpenny a time In no place, except possibly in Spain, are there so many bootblacks as in Greece, or at any rate in Athens They are very necessary there on

\*I should perhaps exempt Mavrodaphne which though sweetish leaves a pleasant taste as of walnuts in the mouth.



## ATHENS

account of the dust. Everyone appears to have their shoes cleaned at least twice a day; even the shabbiest people, whose shoes look hardly worth cleaning.

The Greek bootblacks employ a special technique. The shoes are finished with a colourless wax, which gives a marvellous shine. Well and good, but this wax has also a magnetic attraction for every particle of dust in the neighbourhood. Hence the shoes need recleaning in no time, which is a great stimulus to trade. I had my shoes cleaned by one of the first in the row. By the time I had reached the far end they needed cleaning again. At least so the bootblacks declared.

I stepped out as briskly as the crowds would allow. The Akropolis, however, seemed as far away as when I started. It was quite a long time before I definitely began to climb. Here, the streets became narrow and cobbled. Open drains ran down the middle of some of them, and a sour stench hung in the hot air. At last I came out on a wide path. Above me a wood of young pine trees ran up to the base of the Akropolis. The pinewood was railed off from the path. I had to turn right, round the bend of the hill, in order to reach the motor road which leads up to the entrance.

Athens was stretched out below me, its greyness touched with gold by the setting sun. This gilded, too, the bare hills which shut it in, and up which it struggled, as if to escape a too close confinement.

The main road swept up through pine woods to the foot of a long flight of steps. These led up to the entrance to the Akropolis itself. High above, a little corrugated iron shanty was stuck, incongruously, against the vast stone bulk.

## EAST OF ATHENS

At the foot of the steps stood hawkers of plaster statuettes and souvenirs. They were packing up their goods now. A thin trickle of people was coming out through the gate. I had a horrid feeling that I'd just arrived at closing time. Alas, I was right. When I reached the gate the guardian turned me back. The Akropolis was closed every evening at dusk, he told me. Later, it was only open on nights of the full moon.

So down I had to climb again, through the gathering darkness. Lights were beginning to spring up all over the city, which took on a delicate beauty against the purple of the hills.

At the corner of the Omonia Plateia I met my Swamishman from the boat. He had spent a full day, visiting the Akropolis, the museum, the Byzantine museum, and I don't know what else besides. He was now at a momentary loose end, and suggested that we might dine together and go to a cabaret. I agreed to the dinner. About the cabaret I was more doubtful. I had looked at the photos outside one or two of them earlier in the day. I had decided then, that they were probably neither good enough to be worth seeing or bad enough to be really funny. In any case there was the question of my budget to consider. I thought that after the quiet of Cyprus, I should probably find *café* sitting stimulating enough. I ended, therefore, by turning down the suggestion.

The Swamishman was off north by the morning train. He wanted to 'do' Athens thoroughly while he was about it. I had another nine days to fill in before my boat was due to sail. I had booked a third-class ticket on the *Providence* of the *Messageries Maritimes*.

## ATHENS

This went to Istanbul and Smyrna, then back to Rhodes, Mersina, Larnaca, and so to Syria. There were, I was told, four classes, so I was spared the worst. In any case, going east in mid-summer, the ship was sure not to be crowded. I benefited, too, by a special summer rate. For eight and a half days, including food, this time, I had to pay the equivalent of only about £4.

I spent the evening crowd gazing. First I sat at one *café*, and then at another. I wondered when, if ever, the Athenians went to bed. I know that when I went back to my hotel, about two o'clock, the crowds seemed as thick as they had been several hours earlier.

Another problem was how anybody managed to support coats and waistcoats in the sweltering heat. I was just comfortable in white linen trousers and open shirt. The majority of the men, however, were dressed in wool suits. As for the few countrymen, they had on their traditional heavy woollen tunics, long white woolly tights, and enormous hobnailed shoes.

The soldiers, also, wear variants of this costume. The most picturesque are the *Evzones*. On State occasions these wear large white ballet skirts over their white tights, red phrygian caps, with long tassels, and curly-toed shoes with great pompoms.

All of them are fine-looking men, of six foot or more in height. They mostly come from the mountain districts, and are picked for their good figures. The average lowland Greek looks quite squat by comparison. There were several pairs of *Evzones* parading the Plateia, fully aware of the interest they created.

That night, men and taxi horns sang through my

## EAST OF ATHENS

dreams The next morning I decided on a change of hotel My present one left most things to be desired So after breakfast I set out to look for something better Eventually in a side street off the square I found what I was looking for, and soon transferred myself across

During the morning I began to have peculiar pains inside I put it down to too much rich food after my Spartan diet on the boat, and thought no more about it I had to go up to the bank to change a 'Travellers' cheque There I met an Englishwoman, a friend of ours from Cyprus, who was staying some weeks in Athens When our business was over we had lunch together I said I must be careful on account of the pains I'd been having

What you need, said my friend, is ice cream So off ice cream I lunched, and I heartily wished that I hadn't The result was disastrous I spent the afternoon in agony, and periodically getting rid of a peculiar collection of blood and slime By the evening I decided that perhaps a doctor might be advisable

My friend was staying with a German woman who had been caught in Athens at the outbreak of the War, and had stayed there ever since She, surely, should know of a good doctor, I thought I got up and dressed, and staggered round to her house

She gave me the name of a German-trained, Greco-German doctor I went to him the next morning, after a hectic night I brought him a little sample of my slime in a vaseline tin I had not reckoned with the heat, however When the tin was opened, the slime began not merely to sing, but to announce itself much more pungently The doctor had quickly to

## ATHENS

throw open windows and doors. Then he rang for the maid to remove the body, before he could attend to business. Giving me a look he stuck a thermometer in my mouth and made me lie down, then he started pummelling my belly, asking me questions the while.

"I thought you had got typhoid," he said, "but it is only dysentery." I said: "Thank you." It was just as well not to have typhoid. Still, dysentery was unpleasant enough, and looked like spoiling my trip. I must stay in bed, he ordered; an impossible condition. Finally, he gave me a prescription, and said I must eat nothing but boiled rice, or macaroni (shades of the boat). Also, and most importantly, half an oke of grated raw apples every day. The oke, I should add, is a Turkish measure weighing almost three pounds. It is used in Greece; except in Corfu, where the pound survives, as a legacy of the British occupation; and in Cyprus. It has been abolished in Turkey itself, where the kilo is used.

Milk, to my surprise, was described as poison, also butter or any grease.

So off I went to buy apples and a grater. Also to find some restaurant where I could get plain boiled rice. This was not as easy as might be imagined. There was rice of every possible description except plain. There was rice with various sauces; rice with saffron; rice with cinnamon; with peas, and even the ordinary *pilaffi*, with butter. Plain boiled rice had apparently never been heard of.

At length, as a favour, rice was specially cooked for me. It arrived in a soup plate, swimming glueily in its water. The apples were another difficulty. Their

## EAST OF ATHENS

grating caused quite a sensation, and they themselves were a brown unpleasant mess, when at last they were grated. So after a while I took to chewing them up very carefully, and letting my teeth act as a grater. After the first day, I was determined not to have my holiday entirely spoiled. Diligently, I toiled round to see all the appointed sights. I even managed, when I was a little better, to climb up twice more to the Akropolis to see what had been left by Time, Venetian, Turk, and Briton.

Of the original temples, the Persians left nothing standing. The present ruins date from the time of Pericles. His architects, Iktinos and Kallikrates, finished the Parthenon in 438 B.C. Its massive marble blocks withstood the storms of the centuries, until the cannon balls of the Venetians under Morosini in the seventeenth century began the ruin, which neglect and pillage quickly completed.

Now everything has been tidied up, and the forty-six Doric columns once more stand neatly between the roofless walls. The Greeks continue to grumble about Lord Elgin, and the squashed frieze. (How unsuited a pediment is to a figure composition!) They still claim this as the work of Phidias, on the thin excuse that he supervised the building of the Parthenon. However, any unprejudiced observer, has only to go to the British Museum to see that the frieze is obviously made up of marble masons' copies of clay modelled figures. And not even the same marble mason at that!

I was more interested in the Erechtheion, as a jointly dedicated temple. As well as being dedicated to the hero Erechtheus, it was also dedicated to Athene

## ATHENS

Polias, to Poseidon, and to Pandrosos, the daughter of Kekrops. Hence it's not so well known name of the Pandroseion.

Pausanius mentions several of these jointly dedicated temples. The temple of Sikyon, notably, where Apollo Karneios and Hypnos, the god of sleep, were worshipped in a double temple. Also the temple of Aphrodite and Ares at Matinea.

I visited the Byzantine Museum, where the intricately-carved bas reliefs are amusing and highly decorative, if not great art. Oriental embroidered silks transformed into marble, some of them are of an amazing complexity. Animals and birds figure largely in the carvings. One of the most interesting if not the most pleasing is a twelfth century bas relief showing a bird, crowned and bearing a sceptre in its claw. It is apparently engaged in fighting a tiny man, who holds a shield in one hand and a club in the other. Almost certainly this is a Byzantine interpretation of the classical legend of the war between the pygmies and the cranes, led by their Queen Gerana.

I also visited the Benakis Collection, where I thoroughly enjoyed the delightful T'ang figures, an admission which for some reason produced hoots of derision from my *Prix de Rome* sculptor.

I think I suffered more from hunger than from anything else at this time. To be condemned to meagre meals of boiled rice when surrounded by people filling themselves with rich food, was agony. The final blow was the fact that my hotel was next door to a baker's. Every morning I wakened to the delicious smell of new bread. I had never been so persistently hungry

## EAST OF ATHENS

for years—not since the time I got stranded with no money in Valencia. It was a bitter cold winter and the trouble was that I had to walk in order to keep warm. Walking, of course, made me hungrier. Talk of a vicious circle! Here at least I had not the cold to contend with. Every day it became hotter. The beaches were crowded with bathers.

My friend had moved out to Phaleron. I used to go out to see her sometimes, and spend an afternoon on the beach. I was on my way to catch the tram one day when I saw a fair-haired, tweed-clad figure approaching. It was so obviously English, that I looked a second time. Then to my amazement, I discovered that it was a friend of mine whom I had not seen for nearly eight years.

I remembered hearing that he had come out to Greece some years before to take up a job. Now he told me that he had been a master at Spetzia.

This is a little island a few miles south-west of Athens, off the coast of the Morea. It boasts the only Greek equivalent of an English public school. It was founded some years ago by a native of the place who had made a considerable fortune. Besides his money he had also a blind admiration for English educational methods. This school was the result.

It has struggled on against the Greek schoolboys' complete inability to understand or conform to the 'public school tradition', 'cricket', 'playing the game', or any other of our venerated shibboleths. It started with an English headmaster and English assistant masters. Gradually these had given way to an English head and mixed English and Greek assistants. Finally



## ATHENS

there was just an English head. Now at last even he has packed up and gone to teach in Cyprus. And Spetzia? Spetzia has, one presumes, joyfully shaken off an alien tradition, which sat uncomfortably on its shoulders.

George spoke fluent Greek, as well as most of the other Balkan languages. This wealth of learning had now got him a part-time job with Cooks. He was looking round for something more congenial, however, even if only a return to Spetzia, which he had left a couple of years before. By luck I was able to get him an introduction to Colonel Levides, who had been in exile in London with King George, and who was supposed to have a lot of influence in Athens. By another piece of luck George was with Colonel Levides when the King came in. He was presented and his business explained. The King, acting up to his reputation for good nature, promised to get his brother, who was just about to visit Spetzia to put in a word for him. After all this something ought to have happened. But nothing ever did, and George took a job in Cyprus shortly after.

In the meantime, I was glad to have a companion, and George helped me to see another side of the Athenian life he knew so well. So my last days passed quickly, and it was almost with a shock that I realized that the next day was my last. The time had come to pack up and move on again.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE 'PROVIDENCE', ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

PACK up, did I say? *Easier said than done* When I took out my suitcase, I found to my horror, that I seemed to have collected vast quantities of extra belongings These just refused to be packed

There was a roll of prepared canvas a metre long This most definitely formed a separate parcel Then there was the bag of biscuits, and two oles of the special apples There was the enormous grater, and besides, there were all those things which I'd originally come with These, moreover, seemed to have swollen monstrously since they'd been unpacked

A taxi was out of the question My budget just wouldn't stand it So that meant two journeys by train and tram to the boat I hadn't very much time, either. The first trip went off all right I took my suitcase, and a parcel of the swellings, which I left at the dock I had my passport stamped, and so back to the hotel I then found that it was only an hour to sailing time

Laden with canvas, biscuits, and apples, I hurried back to the Omonia station For some unknown reason, probably malicious, it was seven minutes before a train appeared Then it was a train which crawled in a more leisurely manner, than I have ever known a train to crawl, towards the Piræus

At last we arrived I had only twenty minutes to

## THE *PROVIDENCE*, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

spare, and made a dash for the exit. Alas, I was too optimistic. Here two officials stopped me. In spite of my protests, they stripped all the paper from my carefully-wrapped canvas. Then they placed it upon a large scales, and weighed it. They investigated my biscuits and my apples. At last, having charged me the equivalent of a penny, for which, it appeared, an elaborate receipt was necessary they allowed me to go. I had only eight minutes left.

How I got to the dock I don't know, but I was very thankful to find the *Providence* still in evidence. The man in charge of my suitcase was very agitated, however, as the last boat was just going out. The *Providence* lay not five yards from the quayside. It seemed farcical to have to go out to her in a row boat.

This custom was practically abolished in the Piræus a few years ago. But only after tremendous agitation, were the majority of the boatmen pensioned off. Before that, no ship was allowed to land her passengers direct, even though she lay alongside the dock. Unfortunately the bumboat landing still persists among the islands and small ports. An infernal pest it is, especially in bad weather. To allow the ships to dock, however, would throw so many men out of work that the authorities dare not permit it.

I bundled my things hurriedly into the boat, and we set off for our two minute trip. We were hardly in before it was time to get out. Everyone got tied up in the ropes and baggage, which the boatmen started throwing about wildly. In the excitement, my bag of biscuits was dropped in the harbour. It was rescued

## EAST OF ATHENS

after a struggle, and the water shaken out of it carefully. Which done, the boatman who had rescued it insisted in carrying it in solitary state to my cabin.

I soon found that I was in luck. The boat was practically empty; we were, I think, twenty-six passengers from the Piræus to Istanbul, so I had a six berth cabin to myself. At meal-times we were all grouped at one long table. The rest of the big saloon, with accommodation for several hundred people, looked ghostly and deserted.

Being still on a diet, I spoke to the head waiter, who got me boiled rice and toast from the first class. Everybody was very interested. At least half of them seemed to either have themselves had, or else been intimate with someone who had had dysentery. I was besieged on all sides by sure cures and horrid tales. The most lurid came from a young Greek girl. Her sister had had dysentery continuously for two years, as a result of eating a surfeit of apricots.

There were several Istanbul Greeks on board; very noisy and flamboyant. There were also a number of Turks, mostly students; a charming Bulgarian nun, from some hospital in Asia Minor; and a young 'White' Russian engineer, on his way to Beirut. In the fourth class there was a touring cabaret troupe.

The boss of the troupe and his wife were French. The artistes were, mostly, either Greek or Hungarian. One of the Hungarian girls was very pretty. She used to sing her native folk songs in a thin sweet soprano. The most amusing member was a large blonde German woman, a veritable Brünnhilde. She dressed rather better than the others, in garden party frocks, picture hats, and

## THE PROVIDENCE, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

very high-heeled shoes. I got to know the artistes fairly well. The Russian and I used to go over sometimes to play bagatelle with them. One day Brünnhilde confided to us that she was the *prima donna* of the company.

I had a chance of seeing their performance at Rhodes some time later. When Brünnhilde's turn was announced, I expected at least: *Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore*, or *Mi chimamo Mimi* (she was just about the figure for Mimi). What was my amazement when the lady bounded on to the stage wearing a Red Indian feather headdress. A tiny white dress came about half-way down her enormous pink thighs. Round and round the stage she pranced, whooping loudly and kicking her legs vigorously in the air. This was the whole of her performance. She kept on bounding and whooping until she evidently thought that the audience had had enough of it. Then with an extra loud whoop she bounded off into the wings.

At this time the company had been increased by the addition of an Egyptian girl who did the *danse du ventre*. Almost her entire costume consisted of little metal plates. She had some on each breast; a couple on the stomach; three or four on the belly, and a row on each buttock. As she danced, she played a little rhythm with each series of plates in turn. Then she played two or three sets together. Finally the whole lot were brought into use, in brilliant and complicated cross rhythms. She was the success of the evening.

On board ship the whole company save the *prima donna*, who swept about in a whirl of chiffons and *Trèfle Incarnat*, spent their time interminably playing

## EAST OF ATHENS

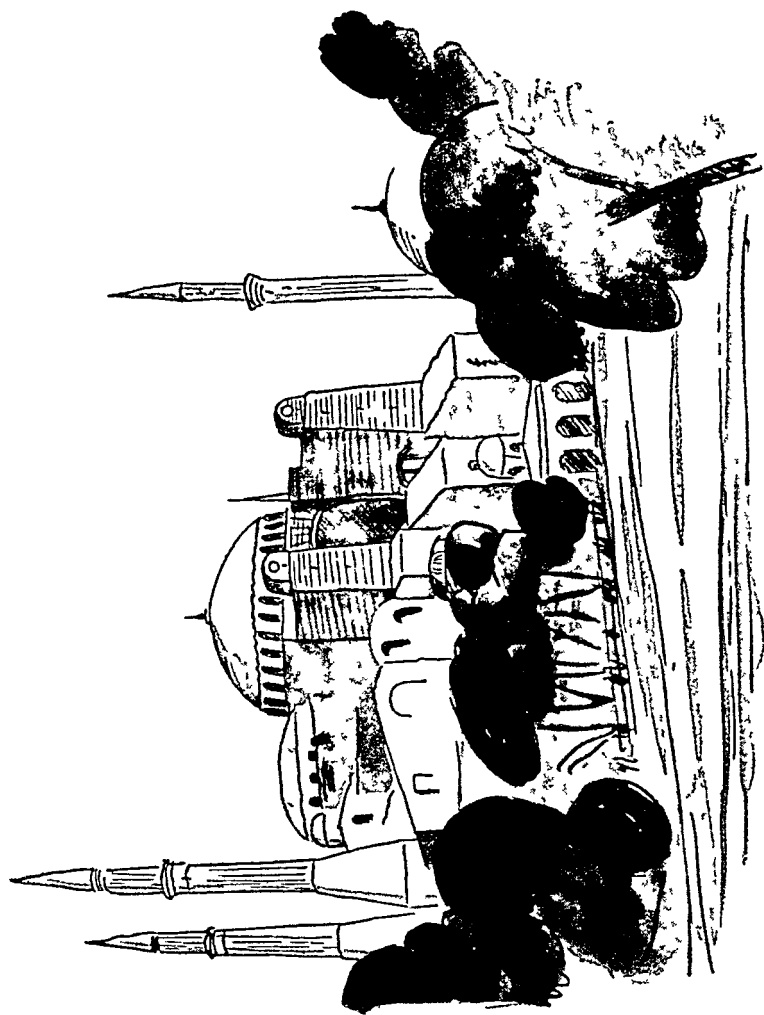
bagatelle Although I played it several times with them I never really grasped the niceties of the game, which was explained to me in a mixture of Greek and Magyar As far as I could see, a lot of the fun seemed to depend on the force with which one could bang the pieces down on the board

The hours went by swiftly, bagatelle playing, gossiping, and watching the ever shifting contours of the coast Before we realized it we were in the Dardanelles The next morning early, so we were told, would bring us to Istanbul, where we were to spend twenty-four hours

It was almost full moon, a dead calm summer's night One could distinguish clearly the banks of the straits Here and there was the white gleam of some villa, or the dark, pointed spear of a cypress, silhouetted for a moment against the paler sky As we entered the Sea of Marmora the whole expanse of water which lay before us in the moonlight, gleamed whitely, like some vast silver mirror

Everybody was up before dawn next morning Eagerly, we hung over the port rail, trying to pierce the white mist which covered the Bosphorus At last, right ahead of us, the sky coloured to a pale saffron And there, against the light, hung the domes and minarets of Istanbul It was an unforgettable picture A picture which will remain in my memory long after the drab dinginess of the reality has been forgotten

It was soon full daylight The mist cleared, and we sailed on, past warehouses, and wharves and steamers, and all the evidences of a busy seaport At the entrance to the Golden Horn little tugs buzzed round us noisily



HAGIA SOPHIA—ISTANBUL

## THE PROVIDENCE, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

At last we docked, over on the Ga'ata shore, where narrow streets of tall grey houses climbed steeply up the hill.

I had taken my bearings from the deck of the ship, and was soon ashore, among the clanging trams. Along the pavements jostled a crowd of men in ill-fitting European suits and busmens' caps, and women in exaggeratedly short skirts. One looks in vain for *tarbush* and *yashmak* in modern Turkey.

Flags and bunting fluttered everywhere, and triumphal arches of painted plywood decorated the Galata Bridge. All this, I discovered, was in honour of the Shah of Persia, who was visiting Mustapha Kemal.

I wandered across the bridge, gazing with disappointment at the famous Golden Horn. It might well, I thought, have been a section of the Thames or Mersey. It was hot, and there was a wind which stirred up the dust, without doing much to cool the air. Once across the bridge, I followed the tramlines. They turned to the left, along a busy street of shops and then wound their way uphill. I climbed on steadily. At last on my left, on the edge of a large, tree-lined square stood the object of my journey, the Hagia Sophia. There was a railed space with gates all around. At each gate were groups of police, who were stopping people from entering. Crowds edged the opposite side of the street and square. I asked one of the policemen in Greek what was going to happen. He did not understand me, but a man beside him told me that the Shah and Mustapha Kemal were coming to service in the mosque. Nobody would be allowed in until they had left. Finding that they were expected



## EAST OF ATHENS

in a few minutes, I decided to wait, if only to catch a glimpse of the man who has done more to change Turkey in a few years than was accomplished in all the previous centuries

To have abolished the caliphate was one thing, to do the same with the tarbush, quite another. Having changed the legal code and done away with polygamy and the harem system, anything was possible. The change to the metric system, the Gregorian calendar and the Latin alphabet were minor matters. The last has led to some quaint phoneticisms. For instance, one begins a meal with *Or duur*, and ends it with *kahve*. The change which affected foreigners in Turkey more than anything else was the transfer of the capital from Istanbul to Ankara. Here, in a raw, new town, high up in the mountains of Asia Minor, the diplomats are condemned to freeze or grill according to the season. One can imagine what longing eyes they cast on the comforts of Pera.

The police cleared everyone from in front of the mosque. All the traffic in the streets along which the two rulers were to pass was stopped. At length, just as I was getting tired of waiting, there was a loud roar of engines. Preceded, and surrounded on all sides, by outriding motor cyclists, armed with revolvers, a large car drove up. Shah and dictator got out quickly and disappeared into St. Sophia. The crowd on the opposite pavement gazed silently. There was no demonstration. Then slowly it dispersed.

There was no chance of seeing St. Sophia that morning. I decided to visit the Suleymaniye mosque and then come back again in the afternoon. This

## THE PROVIDENCE, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

mosque stands high above the harbour. It was built in 1556, and is famous for its *kamariah*. These are windows of carved plaster inset with coloured glass in intricate patterns. Designed by Ibrahim the drunkard, they are exquisite in detail and gorgeous in colour. Looking at them the eye is almost dazzled. Outside the mosque, in a beautiful cloister, is the Turbé of Suleiman. Nearby is the Turbé of Roxalana and her son. Exquisite Isnik tiles, depicting tulips and black-stemmed almonds, decorate the tomb.

On my way back I went into the Validé Yeni Djami Mosque, which faces the Galata Bridge. Built just over a century later than the Suleymaniyé, it is decorated with blue and white Damascus faiences. A notable feature are the carved wooden doors. In these are elaborate medallions of tortoiseshell, set over gold, and having inlaid borders of patterned ivory.

It was a little past noon. The mosque, being in a busy part of the town, was fairly full of worshippers for the *dulr* prayers, so I did not stay long. As I was anxious to make the very most of the short time I had, I decided against going back to the *Providence*. I found a rather dreary little *café*, which supplied black coffee and bread; I was still on a diet. Having made a hurried meal I set about finding how I could visit the ruins of the Palace of Tekfour Serai and still leave time to return to St. Sophia before dusk.

I had been told that Tekfour Serai was the only existing building in Istanbul which could now give any idea of what the palaces and houses of the wealthy classes were like when Byzantium was at the height of its power. Built in the eleventh century the walls are

## EAST OF ATHENS

still standing, the façade, two stories of windows over a third of arches. On two sides the façades are ornamented with elaborate balconies rather similar to the Arab *Mesrebeeyehs*. The arches of the ground floor are supported on a system of alternate slender column and solid pillar, the marbles of the surface alternating light and dark. The two upper floors are similarly decorated, and between the two are ornamental bands, where white and yellow marbles are employed in conjunction with brick, to form varied and elaborate designs. In fact the entire surface of the building is as intricately patterned as an oriental carpet, white and coloured marbles alternating with bricks, the whole softened by time and weather to a subtle glow of colour.

The palace stands where the twelfth century wall joins that of Theodosius. These walls, almost eight kilometres in length, cut across the isthmus from the top of the Golden Horn to the Sea of Marmora. In spite of the damage done by earthquakes and by the great siege of 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks, one can still find considerable traces, particularly a moat some thirty feet deep, crossed at intervals by aqueducts.

The outer wall, whose crenellated parapet was thirty feet high, is flanked at intervals by towers rising to a hundred feet; some octagonal and some square. A few of the brick cupolas which surmounted the octagonal towers are still in place.

The great wall was formerly pierced by strongly fortified gates, some of them, like the one at Hane Kapou, almost fortresses in themselves. Among them

## THE PROVIDENCE, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

was the Golden Gate, through which the emperors made their triumphal entries into Byzantium. This entrance of which a considerable portion still exists, was built about 390 under Theodosius the Great. It consists of three large bays, now walled up; and a door, added under Theodosius the Second, its arch supported by two columns of green marble, whose capitals were decorated with eagles. A number of bas reliefs of legends from classical mythology still existed as late as the seventeenth century, but are now completely destroyed, as are the two towers of polished marble which flanked the great bays.

From the Hagia Sophia, the great wall, and the remains of this one palace of Tekfour Serai, one is able mentally to reconstruct something of the semi-oriental brilliance of the Byzantium of a thousand years ago.

But it was high time for me to hurry back into the town if I wanted to pay anything more than a casual visit to St. Sophia. I bemoaned the fact that I had only twenty-four hours to visit a town for which a month would have been little enough. Still twenty-four hours was better than nothing. I looked anxiously at my watch as we rattled back. What if I should find the church again closed. But I was alarming myself unnecessarily.

If St. Sophia is impressive from the outside, it is nothing to the effect caused by a first view of the interior, flooded with light. In its stark simplicity of design, it must be one of the most majestic buildings in existence. It is, too, one of the few, if not perhaps the only church, in which the Byzantines were content to forego their love of the snug.

## EAST OF ATHENS

Depending as it does on its perfection of proportion, and not on any casual ornamentation, the whole interior gives an impression of immense space and light. Not that it is barren space, for in spite of the happy lack of ornament, the church glows with colour from the polychrome marbles of the walls and double rows of galleries.

In the middle rises a vast dome,\* supported above arches by massive pillars. The base of the dome is pierced at close intervals by a series of windows, which give the appearance of a jewelled diadem, above which the dome itself seems to hang suspended in space.

It is built of light, bottle-shaped bricks from Petruna, a little village on the Island of Rhodes. Each brick is inscribed: God has placed it, and it shall never be displaced. This is the second dome to be built. The original one, made by Isadore of Milet and Anthemius of Tralles, the architects of the Emperor Justinian, of similarly inscribed bricks, very soon collapsed. In this case God evidently did not consider that he *had* placed it.

The church was completely bare of ornament except for the rugs and carpets scattered about on the marble pavement. The Byzantine mosaics, however, were in process of being cleaned of the coats of whitewash which has hidden them for so long. A few Turks were at their prayers; kneeling, bowing, and turning their heads in their ritual motions. They were apparently oblivious of the American tourists who were loudly 'doing' St. Sophia, ignorant or careless of the fact that they were in a place of worship.

\* 54m. to 56 ft. 3 in. in diameter

## THE PROVIDENCE, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

The afternoon was nearly over when I collected my shoes from outside the door. By the time I reached the waterfront the sun was setting. A flaming red sunset, it caught alight the water of the straits, with their busy shipping, and the piled grey houses of the Galata shore. I crossed slowly back over the bridge and along to the deserted ship. We had lost the majority of our few passengers here, and the new ones had not yet come on board. I wondered how to spend the evening. I did not want to stay on the boat, but did not know where to go. The population of Istanbul seemed woefully ignorant of anything but their own language. Several people had spoken to me in Turkish. I had hopefully replied in Greek, knowing what a big Greek population the city used to have. The interchange had not been very successful, however. So now I decided to wait and ask one of the stewards. The steward expressed the opinion that Istanbul was a damned dull place at night. It was getting duller every trip, he added. He could not suggest anything, but to go up to one of the *cafés* at Pera. Unless, that was, I wanted to go to the waterfront bars and get drunk. I thought a solitary pub crawl would be most dull, so Pera won the night. After dinner I climbed up the steep street to sit at a *café* above the twinkling lights of the city. I spent my evening watching the emancipated Turkish ladies and their escorts enjoying, one hopes, the fruits of modernity. Maybe, of course, they were merely Levantines. This is essentially the European quarter, and even to a stranger, the difference on crossing the Galata Bridge is noticeable. Perhaps it was my own fault, but I thought it all extremely dull. I heartily

## EAST OF ATHENS

regretted the short skirts, the busmen's caps, and the trams. In fact, all the dreary evidences of Europeanism which met my eyes wherever I turned.

I thought sadly of the vanished Constantinople of the Sultans. Vanished for us now, except in the records of former travellers, like Sir Paul Rycaut, Knolles, and Lady Mary Montagu. In the Istanbul of to-day only a faint ghost lingers on.

Next morning found the domes and minarets fading away behind us. A faint breeze rippled the surface of the water as we entered the Sea of Marmora. Not enough, though, to cause any motion to a ship of our size. We sailed on through cloudless weather, past shores covered with orchards and vineyards. The country houses and cypresses, which had shown themselves, magpie fashion, in the moonlight, two nights before, stood stripped of their mystery. In the Dardanelles, the broken and deserted fortifications still crowned the hilly shores. A couple of young Turks poured indignant complaints into my ears over the demilitarization of the straits. An "undefended passage to their country's heart" as they, somewhat dramatically, put it.

When we turned south again, the sea and hills began to take on once more the deeper, softer colours which they had temporarily lost. In the night we would pass Lesbos. Next morning we were due at Smyrna.

I went down to my six-berth cabin, which I now shared with a large rat, whom I had discovered on a lower bunk, calmly eating my dirty clothes, and went to sleep.

## THE PROVIDENCE, ISTANBUL, SMYRNA

In the early dawn, sea and sky were bathed in an opalescent light, which half hid the delicate contours of the hills. Lesbos lay behind us. Now Smyrna appeared ahead out of the pearly morning mist. Alas, not the genial, cosmopolitan city of former days, but a new town just risen from the ashes of the old. A town with little to recommend it save its situation on that lovely bay, where earth and sea and sky combine in perfect beauty.

I heard the sad tale of Smyrna later, from an English-woman whom I met at tea, at the consulate in Rhodes. She and her family had lived in Smyrna until the disastrous war of 1922, when the town was sacked by French-officered Turkish troops. Curious *volte face* when one considers that Ionia was Greece's booty for her help to the Allies during the Great War. They had lost their home then, and all their possessions. Now they lived in Athens, not caring to return to the new Smyrna. To a country, too, where now, foreign residents were far from welcome. Mrs. Forbes described to me the bitterness which is still felt because the British warships, which lay in the harbour during the sack, had orders to take on board British subjects only. The Greek women and children were left to be massacred in their thousands, in the traditional Turkish manner.

I did not go on shore. I preferred to sit where I could watch the funny little horse-drawn trams going backwards and forwards along the waterfront. With the sun on my face, and all beauty around me, I was content to dream away the morning.

Few people came on board, so the rat and I were



## EAST OF ATHENS

still left in undisputed possession of the six berths. Among our new passengers were the wife, son and daughter of an Italian contractor. He was transferring his business to Beirut, driven out of Turkey by the high cost of living, and the enormous taxation to which foreigners are subject. The son, aged eighteen, had been chief of the forty odd Fascists in Smyrna. He had, he told me, already been on two conducted tours of Italy, at Government expense, in his official capacity. Good propaganda, for he was a passionate admirer of Mussolini, and believer in the glorious future of Italy.

He was now going to the American College in Bayreuth. Next year he hoped to go to Rome, to join the air force. When I said good-bye to him as I was disembarking at Larnaca, I said jokingly that perhaps I'd see him in Rome next year. At that time nothing was further from my thoughts than going to Italy. Nine months later, however, found me staying in the Via del Babuino. One evening, I was on my way back from an extra special example of those parades which help to enliven Fascist Rome. Il Duce had harangued his legions from in front of the Palazzo Venezia. The streets were full of uniforms. Suddenly I was hailed by a gorgeously-clad young man. It was my friend from the *Providence*. Now stationed at Bari, this was his first visit to Rome since our last meeting.

I felt that the long arm of coincidence had been given an extra tweak.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### 'KHEDIVIAL MAIL'

WE had to go to Egypt in July. Having travelled so successfully 'deck' on the Greek steamers, what more natural than that we should book the same way to Port Saïd. But in this case we had reckoned without the fact that we should be travelling on an English, and not on a Greek ship.

The Khedivial Mail Line has the monopoly of the service connecting Cyprus with Egypt. Its ships, on that particular run at least, are small and extremely indifferent. The one which was to take us to Port Saïd was very late in arriving at Larnaca, where we were to board her. In fact night fell with characteristic abruptness as we were being rowed out.

It had been one of those damp, steamy evenings which the summer often brings to the south coast of Cyprus. A white mist hung over the sea, and the town had been stiflingly hot. But now, with the fall of the sun, a sudden chill set in.

We were shivering slightly when we climbed on board, and made straight for some chairs in a sheltered corner. As I said, however, we had forgotten that we were travelling on an English boat. A steward demanded our tickets, and looked at them with disapproval. He informed us coldly that this was the second class deck, and shepherded us up towards the bows. With a

## EAST OF ATHENS

supercilious finger, he indicated a slimy iron ladder, which descended into the blackness of a lower deck, and left us

Trying to appear more cheerful than we felt, we scrambled and slithered down the ladder. Below were some three square yards of deck, surrounded by the dimly looming forms of machinery.

Chains and rings caught at our feet as we moved, like hands deliberately trying to trip us. I dumped the suitcases down and stared around, trying to pierce the darkness, which the trailing sea mist intensified. It was soon obvious that there was nothing to sit on save the bare deck, or pieces of assorted machinery, all of which were streaming with damp and grease.

In one corner two, or was it three, figures were huddled. They were so enveloped in rugs, that it was impossible to decide either sex or number.

We had just sat down despairingly on our suitcases, which seemed to be the only comparatively dry things within reach, when the man with the hurricane lamp appeared. Where he came from, I was never quite sure. He just appeared from the confusion of machinery. One moment there was nothing, and the next moment the hurricane lamp was swinging in our faces. The man behind the lamp was tall and thin, that much we could see. Also, probably, he was dark, for the whites of his eyes, and the glint of his teeth, were all we could distinguish of his face.

Evidently satisfied with his inspection, he disappeared as suddenly as he had come. A minute later he was back again, this time clutching two deck chairs. They were flimsy and dilapidated, but with oriental

## *KHEDIVIAL MAIL*

persistence, he set himself to hire them to us for the night, at a price for which we could have bought them new. Eventually, however, a bargain was concluded. Wrapping ourselves in our rugs, we sat down, expecting to hear a rending of canvas as we did so, so shaky did the chairs appear.

But before we even left Larnaca, the damp had soaked through the thick rugs, and brought us once more to our feet.

There was nothing for it but to get a transfer. We left our deck chairs and climbed up once more to the lighted part of the deck. The ship was not crowded, so we had no difficulty in obtaining berths. So for that night, we lay in comparative luxury, watching the cockroaches playing 'tig' on the ceiling above.

Cockroaches seemed to be a speciality of this boat. We each had them in our cabins; the lavatories were full of them; and there were two handsome brutes under the bread at breakfast. I remembered the wife of one of the District Commissioners in Cyprus telling me that she had found a couple in her suitcase on getting home after a trip to Egypt. She had spoken with, what I felt at the time, to be an uncalled for bitterness. After that breakfast, I felt more sympathetic towards her.

Next to us at table was a burly, middle-aged man, in a striped pyjama coat. Our mutual indignation over the cockroaches formed an introduction, and later we found ourselves talking to him on deck. Having left Cyprus so late, we were not due at Port Saïd until after midday. He was fussing because he expected to meet a friend there who would drive him up to Cairo.

## EAST OF ATHENS

He had just been across to Cyprus to escort his wife and daughter, who were going to spend the summer up on Mount Troodos. He was in a hurry to get back to business.

He asked if we were going straight on to Cairo. I said, yes. Then I suddenly realized that this was Sunday. I'd spent all my ready money on the more expensive tickets, and the banks would be closed. I swore, and said that I supposed I'd have to wait over in Port Saïd until the next day in order to cash a cheque.

"Not at all," said Mr. Philipescu, our new acquaintance. "How much do you need?" And out of his pocket he produced a bulging wallet. Embarrassed, I protested that I couldn't borrow money from a complete stranger. Mr. Philipescu was obdurate, however, and refused even to accept a cheque. I could pay him back the next day in Cairo, he said. Eventually I accepted two pounds, which would pay our fares to Cairo, and our meals that day.

We were now in sight of Port Saïd. It was time to go and finish packing. In a few minutes we were steaming through the entrance of the canal, among the swarms of shipping of every size and description. On our right, a giant P. & O. liner was landing passengers on to a floating dock. Beside her, an old coal-burning ship was busy refuelling. Scores of dark men, naked save for loin cloths or tattered trousers, were carrying endless baskets of coal up the narrow planks, and tossing them through the gaping holes in the ship's sides. In the barges which clustered around her, more dark men sweated and shouted as they refilled the

rapidly emptied baskets. The coal dust hung in the air like a black pall.

We let go our anchor out in the middle of the canal. Once again, we were to be condemned to landing in a small boat. The passport officials had come on board by this time, and the endless formalities began. This was succeeded by the Customs. There we had no trouble, but our new friend was held up on account of some cherries. Delicious cherries grow in the hill districts of Cyprus, and he had brought a small basket back with him. Now these were the occasion for a great disturbance. They had to be uncovered, weighed, and sampled both by the Customs Officials, and also by the porters standing around. They were then taken away, ostensibly to be looked at, but more likely to be tasted, by some higher official. Eventually, after about half the cherries had been eaten, a duty was assessed for the remainder. This involved more delay in filling in the necessary forms. We fretted at the delay, as we were getting hungry. But as Mr. Philipescu had suggested that we might all lunch together, we felt obliged to stay and see him through.

We passed the time in reading the notices in various languages, instructing passengers not to tip the porters. When we eventually left, however, this didn't prevent a crowd of them from gathering around us with outstretched palms. Left to ourselves, we should undoubtedly have succumbed to a mild form of brigandage. But in Mr. Philipescu, the porters found their match. He bundled us into a carriage, said a few well chosen words in Arabic, and the crowd turned pale, and wilted away.

## EAST OF ATHENS

We drove along a dusty road towards the centre of the town. Here Mr. Philipescu left us at a restaurant, while he went in search of the friend who was to drive him to Cairo. The restaurant was on a corner where two main streets crossed. It was upstairs, and had a wide balcony set with tables, overlooking the street. We ordered beer, and sat down to watch the seething crowds below. Carriages there were in plenty; generally with women in them. The European women were in light dresses, the Egyptians in black, with black lace veils covering their faces. They wore also, what looked like elaborate metal cotton reels on the bridges of their noses. These were, we were told, a symbol of their married state, a sort of nasal wedding ring.

The majority of the people, however, seemed to be on foot. There were crowds of girls in flimsy dresses, olive-skinned young men, probably Greeks and Italians, in white suits, and Egyptians in European clothes and tarbushes. Nearly everybody was carrying a towel and bathing costume. Nowhere, except on the waiters in the restaurant and some of the obviously poorer classes, did I see a complete native costume.

Mr. Philipescu returned in a few minutes to say that he had found his friend, who was leaving for Cairo at three o'clock, it was then about half-past one. His friend had offered to take us as well, he said. He had a large touring car, and it would be no trouble if we cared to come. We were naturally delighted at being spared the long and tedious train journey, and said so. First, however, added Mr. Philipescu, he must tell us that both he and his friend were Jews. Did we object to travelling with two Jews? Whatever our prejudices

## KHEDIVIAL MAIL

might have been, the circumstances would have made it impossible for us to show them. However, we were quite honest in assuring him of our lack of bias.

Mr. Philipescu certainly, did not look in the least like a Jew. That is to say that he did not have any of the Hittite physical characteristics which one ordinarily associates with Jewishness. In this, he seemed to take a somewhat naïve satisfaction. As his name indicated, he was a Romanian by birth, but he had lived most of his life in Egypt. He was now, he told us, a building contractor to the Egyptian Government.

This was just the time when the Nazi drive against the Jews was at its height. Consequently our friend, in common probably with the rest of his people, was exaggeratedly race conscious. He refused to buy anything German, and sent back his Munich beer to be changed for a Bass or a Worthington.

His friend, when we met him, proved to have all the physical characteristics that Mr. Philipescu lacked. He was in a great hurry to start, so we were soon racing through the grey dust along the bank of the Suez Canal. Through the tree-lined streets of Ismailia, with its neat bungalows and gardens, we drove without stopping. The heat and the blinding dust gave me an unbearable thirst. Willingly would I have continued what the customs officials had begun, and finished the basket of cherries.

On and on we raced; past mud-walled villages, palms, bullocks, and irrigation ditches. At last, in a larger village than usual, we came to a halt. On one side was a muddy canal full of naked children. On the other was the village, composed in almost equal parts of mud and corrugated iron.



## EAST OF ATHENS

Around us in the thick dust, scratched innumerable tiny hens. They were all nearly as naked as the children in the canal, for, with the idea of making them feel cooler, most of their feathers had been plucked out. The street looked as if the Last Trump had sounded at a poulterers.

Alas for any thought of a cooling drink, however. The village provided nothing more refreshing than lukewarm bottled lemonade. But at that moment anything liquid felt better than nothing, even if it ultimately made one thirstier.

The village loafers, the children, and the beggars clustered round the car, poking at the bonnet, fiddling with the door handles, and intermittently whining for *baksheesh*. Mr Philipescu and his friend had disappeared. We had no Arabic save the one word *imshi*, which most foreigners believe means 'go away'. We used it in this case without the slightest effect, so we were very thankful when they reappeared, and we started off once more.

Almost before we had realized that we were there, we were among the dilapidated shacks, and tall apartment buildings of Cairo, dodging the stream of cars, and the clanging trams. Certainly about the part of the city which we passed through that evening, there was nothing of the romantic East, scarcely even of the East. We seemed to be in a rather shoddy French provincial town. There were French department stores, French *pâtisseries*, French hairdressers, cinemas, even notices in French.

We had no idea where to stay, but Mr Philipescu said that they would drop us at a good hotel. Their

## KHEDIVIAL MAIL

choice proved to be a big, rather ornate establishment, much given to red plush, and tarnished gilt mirrors. The rooms were large and airy, however, and the beds seemed comfortable, so we settled in. Mr. Philipescu agreed to lunch with us the next day, and he repaid his loan; his friend was leaving Cairo again in the morning.

The first thing that we did when they had gone, was to call for glasses of iced water. There is a saying in Egypt, that those who drink the Nile water, will always return. It is the equivalent of a coin thrown in the *Trevi* Fountain. Now, when I drank it for the first time, I knew why they returned; it was for another drink. Throughout the couple of weeks we spent in Cairo, I didn't change my opinion. I have never tasted more delicious water. You can have your *Hospice de Beaune*, I thought, or I might have thought had I felt less exhausted from the hot drive, give me Nile Water!

We sat in a state of semi-coma for a few minutes, listening to the deafening racket of traffic, and shouting voices. The hotel was on the corner of two principal streets, and a line of trams passed under our windows.

It had become quite dark before we moved, and the sky showed indigo above the glitter of the street lights. We were in no hurry for sightseeing, so we decided on dinner, and an early night in bed. Cairo could wait until the morrow.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CAIRO

WE were optimists, if we thought that we were going to have an early night. Cairo may not be quite as noisy as Athens, but the section where our hotel was situated went well towards competing. Tired as we were, heat, noise, and mosquitoes made sleep impossible until the small hours of the morning. Feeling as if we had sat up all night in the train, we vowed to find a quieter hotel before the day was out.

We were packed ready to leave when we went out that morning. It was after midnight, however, before the change was eventually accomplished. By the time that we had decided on another hotel—one at the end of the main street, close to the Opera House, it was too late to move that morning. In the afternoon, of course, it would be too hot to do anything; so the business was put off until the evening.

During the search for the new hotel, I received the greatest shock I had had for a long time. I saw *Shepherd's Hotel* for the first time! Never having read *The Garden of Allah* (which *was* about Cairo, wasn't it?) I can't blame Mr. Hitchens for any illusions I harboured about that hotbed of Edwardian romance. But to be faced with this gaunt, ugly building, separated from the street by no more than a few square yards of earth and some tired palm trees, was beyond a joke.

I had visualized a blend of the *Royal Hawaiian Hotel* at Honolulu, and the *Galle Face* at Colombo, raised to a higher degree. *Royal Hawaiian* plus *Galle Face*, in a bracket to the Nth., equals *Shepherds'*, my imagination had said. To be confronted by the reality was insulting.

Was this what all the fuss was about? I asked myself. Was this what had caused romantic hearts to beat faster beneath diamond stomachers, and mustachioed gallants to find even 'leg o' mutton' sleeves alluring? We go round the world having our illusions blighted.

So it was in a thoroughly disillusioned state of mind, that we went to keep our appointment with Mr. Philipescu. We lunched at a pleasant restaurant in a quiet square, near the famous *Groppi's*. The penalty of eating out of doors in an eastern town, is the persistence of the beggars and hawkers. As this was dead out of season, the vendors of 'genuine Egyptian jewellery' and 'feelthy peectures' were offering their wares at something approaching their real value; that is to say, at about a thirtieth of 'tourist' prices. Starting at fantastic figures, when the least interest was shown in their goods, the prices dropped with lightening rapidity as the interest appeared to wane.

One seller of *loucoun* demanded thirty piastres a box. We didn't really want any, but M. said jokingly: "Two piastres." "Done, lady," said the merchant, and before we realized it the deal was completed. We were evidently destined to acquire food that day, for a few minutes later a seller of one piastre lottery tickets passed. Mr. Philipescu bought one for each of us,

## EAST OF ATHENS<sup>1</sup>

and we sat back to wait. The man did some juggling, which I, at any rate, watched uncomprehendingly. Presently, however, he squatted down on his heels, and announced that M.'s ticket had won a melon. What a melon that was! It was one of the largest I have ever seen, and smelt deliciously of ripe strawberries. I don't know what variety of melon it was, but I have never since come across another with just that peculiar scent and flavour.

We sat on so long at the restaurant, that the idea of a siesta became out of the question. Mr. Philipescu was very anxious also, to show us his flat. So presently we found ourselves being driven through drab and dusty streets, towards the outskirts of the city. The flat proved to be one of a gaunt, prison-like block, which Mr. Philipescu had built himself. Inside, it was of an almost incredible ugliness. The walls were covered with enlarged photographs, the chairs with antimacassars, and the mantleshef and upright piano with red ball fringe.

We were shown photographs of the wife and daughter, and various other members of the family; and made the acquaintance of the pet dog. This was a white pomeranian, named Lulu, who, unlike the majority of her breed, was not over given to yapping. Only when Mr. Philipescu picked her up, and asked after his absent family, demanding: "*Oh, Lulu, où est Dooie; où est Vera?*" she threw back her head, and answered: "*Ya-oooh!*"

It was so late when we got back to the city, that we again put off moving our baggage; this time until after dinner. After dinner, however, when we reached

## CAIRO

the hotel, who should we find waiting for us but Mr. Philipescu again. He now found that he had to go to Upper Egypt on business the next day, he explained. As his time in Cairo was going to be so short, and we would be gone when he returned, he had come round to take us for a sightseeing drive. What about our move? Oh, that could wait. Nobody went to bed early in Cairo. So we were whisked off into his car.

What would we like to see? he demanded. Not knowing Cairo at all, we said that we would leave it to him. What about a trip through the Red Light district? It was quite near, and might prove amusing. All right, we said, we were quite agreeable to anything. At any rate there was a certain protection in being in a car, one could more easily take to flight in an emergency.

Soon we were swinging past *Shepherd's Hotel*, and found to our surprise that the district began not a hundred yards beyond. A main street, with rattling trams, ran through it. Here the pavements were edged with tawdry shops, and little cheap hotels. But it was up the narrow alleys that led away into the darkness on either side, that the real district lay. Only a few of its denizens appeared among the milling crowds on the main street, or leaning out of the upper windows of the hotels.

Enormous cow-like women for the most part, they were dressed in garish clothes, and wore quantities of heavy jewellery. The sweat on their badly made-up faces shone in the lamp light. We drove slowly twice up and down the street, but never completely stopped,

## EAST OF ATHENS

so it was not until later that I got a closer view of any of the types

Our cursory survey of low life finished, we drove back past *Shepherd's*, and turned off to the right, down the main street. We passed our hotel without stopping, and swinging away to the left, zigzagged among bewildering side streets. I wondered vaguely where we were going. It was not until we had passed the shuttered bulk of the *Semiramis*, and were crossing a wide bridge over what was, presumably, the Nile, that I thought of asking "I thought we'd go to an open air cabaret," said Mr Philipescu, in reply to my question "It's quite close to here."

Even as he spoke, we drove into an open place, glitteringly festooned with electric bulbs. There were *cafes* all around, their radios blaring into the hot night. We parked the car, and got out. Behind a belt of trees, and a high green trellis was the cabaret. A large gravelled space, dotted with little tables, ran from the entrance to the brilliantly lit stage. Round the sides were low wooden galleries, reached by flights of steps.

The performance had already begun, and most of the tables were occupied. At those in the centre were mostly what looked like family parties, while on the galleries were couples, and girls in evening dress. We followed Mr Philipescu to a table up near the stage. There were, he explained, three parts where one could sit. The back tables, at which the drinks were cheap, the front ones, where they were moderately priced, and the galleries, where they were very expensive. These last tables were generally only used by the girls

## CAIRO

of the establishment, and whatever men were engaging their attention for that night.

The performance wasn't bad, the beer was pleasantly cold, and above us the stars twinkled frantically, in a vain attempt to compete with the neon lights. But as we had arrived so late, the show was soon over. It seemed a pity to have come so far for such a short time, said our friend. What about driving out to see the Pyramids? We couldn't have a better first impression, and besides, we were already half-way there.

We had got our second wind by this time, and were quite willing, though I did point out that it appeared to be a moonless night. Oh, it would be up any time now, Mr. Philipescu assured us. I had a strong suspicion that he was wrong, but I didn't argue the point. We got into the car and drove off.

I am not fond of motoring; in fact, as a rule, I dislike it. The occasions when I have really enjoyed motoring could be counted on the fingers of one hand. They have always been on summer nights. I can remember a drive from London to Windsor in the small hours of a summer's morning; another out in Australia one January, when Sydney groaned under a pall of heat, and all eyes searched for the light signal, which would announce the first breath of the life-bringing southerly, flying cool from the depths of the Antarctic. Then there was a drive high above the twinkling lights of Honolulu, through the heavy, scent-laden air; and now once more, I was rushing through the hot night.

Beyond the bright ribbon of the road, the darkness was intense. Only a few pin points of light scattered



## EAST OF ATHENS

in the distance, showed that other people were awake. Apart from ourselves, the road was deserted. We passed a large group of buildings, and in a few minutes more pulled up at the side. The moon had not as yet shown any sign of putting in an appearance. We got out of the car, and stumbled a few yards into the darkness beyond our headlights. Away beyond us was a blacker darkness against the desert—the great Pyramid.

It was useless to attempt to go any further. The ground appeared to be strewn with boulders, which we dislodged at every step. We had had a drive, but we could hardly in honesty, tell our friends that we had seen the Pyramids by moonlight. Perhaps as well, the pastime has been rather overdone of late. After all what is there to it now, with the facilities of modern travel. One must go further afield these days, in order legitimately, to tell a traveller's tale.

A clock somewhere was striking midnight, as we got back into the car. By the time we reached Cairo I had forgotten that we had booked rooms in a new hotel. It was only the sight of our suitcases, still waiting in the hall, that brought it back to me. Mr Philipescu had by this time driven off, so I sent the porter out to look for a carriage. He came back with one in a few minutes, and we climbed limply in. We were beginning now to feel the effects of our sleeplessness the night before.

I have, luckily, a good sense of direction. Now, in spite of my sleepiness, I suddenly realized, that after leaving the main street, we were being driven in the

## CAIRO

wrong direction. Just as we were about to turn down a dark, narrow street, I tapped the driver on the back, and told him to stop. He did so with an obvious ill grace. But for the fact that there were two policemen standing on the opposite corner, I had a feeling that he might not have done so at all.

There was no possibility of a genuine mistake on his part. The hotel we were going to was quite well known, and centrally situated. Besides, he had said that he knew it well. Now, with much muttering, he turned his horse about, and made straight for it without further directions being needed.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, the proprietor was still about when we arrived. He sent a boy out to take our cases from the driver and bring them upstairs. The room was a large one, with french windows opening on to a balcony. We had delayed a few minutes in the hall. Now, when we came in, these were open, and one of the suitcases stood beside them. I looked around for the other; searched in the cupboard, under the bed; there was no sign of it. Thinking that it must have been left in the hall, I rang for the boy, and told him to bring it up. He looked at me blankly, and called out in Arabic to the proprietor, who was passing along the corridor. The latter stopped, and as I repeated my request, translated it to the boy.

This produced an excited flood of words. "The boy says you only brought one suitcase," said the proprietor. "We arrived with two suitcases," I replied, "and they must be found." There was a tremendous commotion at this, and several more boys appeared. The bedroom was turned upside down. The hall was

## EAST OF ATHENS

searched, the balcony, the room next door, which happened to be empty, all without success. The boy who had brought up the one suitcase, swore that that was all he had taken from the cab. If there was another, the driver must have driven off with it, he declared. The proprietor was prepared to swear to the honesty of his staff, but there was always the balcony to consider.

At last all hope of finding the missing suitcase in the hotel was abandoned. He thought that I should go at once and report the loss to the police, said the proprietor. I thought so too. The police station, he told me, was only about a quarter of an hour's walk, past *Shepherd's Hotel*. If I carried straight on till I came to a large open space, and then inquired, I couldn't miss it. Given fresh energy by annoyance, I set out.

The streets were practically deserted, but I found my way without difficulty. The police station seemed to be the only place around that was awake. There were several police standing at the entrance, but nobody questioned me as I went in. I found myself in a large, brilliantly lit room. It was divided into two parts by a low railing with a gate in the middle. The front part of the room contained a table with an inkpot on it, and some benches. Here there were a few policemen standing about aimlessly. On one of the benches two *fellahin* one with a black eye, and the other with a bleeding nose, sat glaring at one another. At the other end of the room behind the railing were some smaller tables piled with papers. At these sat what appeared to be higher officials.

## CAIRO

As I crossed the room, one of them looked at me questioningly. I spoke to him hopefully in English. He smiled and shook his head. Then I tried French, which I imagined every educated Egyptian understood, but with equally poor results. I tried Greek; I tried Italian; I even, in a despairing attempt, tried Spanish. It was all no good. However, the official beckoned me into the pen, and giving me a chair, indicated that I should sit down and wait.

I thanked him, and settled down to be patient. As I did so, there was a sound of loud screaming from outside. In a moment, two more policemen appeared, dragging between them a large negress, clad in nothing but a pair of emerald green satin trousers. Behind them walked a pale brown girl in a pink silk dressing-gown, edged with dirty feather trimming. It was she who was screaming, holding her hands to her left cheek, where blood was oozing from four deep scratches. As they came into the room, she made a wild dive at the negress. Without losing his grip of the latter, one of the policemen jerked his knee into her attacker's stomach, making her double up with a howl, on the floor.

They all came to a halt in front of the railing. The official who had spoken to me looked up from the writing which he had been doing all through the disturbance, and said something. Immediately one of the policemen began to recite, in a monotonous, sing-song voice. Each time that the negress tried to interrupt him, he clapped a hand over her mouth, without varying by a fraction, the speed or pitch of his recitation.

## EAST OF ATHENS

Having finished, at last he turned to the brown girl, who gave tongue clamorously. Gesticulating so vigorously that her dressing-gown flew open, showing her to be completely naked underneath, she indicated the scratches on her face. Screaming, she pointed at the negress, who looked at her contemptuously, until she stopped through exhaustion. The officer, who up till now, had remained with a look of silent boredom on his face, spoke briefly, and turned again to the papers on his desk. The policeman saluted, turned the negress about, and marched her out of the room.

For about five minutes there was silence, save for the scratching of pens, and the rustling of paper. The brown girl stood by the railing, still holding her face. The two *fellâhin* on the bench still glared at one another. A policeman lounged in the doorway, picking his teeth, and yawning. I was beginning to wonder what I was waiting for, when there was a slight stir outside.

A broadly grinning young policeman appeared, shoving in front of him a stout, elderly woman, and a pretty girl of about sixteen. The woman was grey haired, and dressed in black, relieved only by a large cameo brooch on her expansive bosom. She looked like a respectable housekeeper, or the *Madame* of a brothel. Taking time and place into consideration, I decided that she must be the latter.

They sat down on the bench beside the *fellâhin*, who gave up glaring at one another for a moment, in order to stare at the girl. She had been crying, and the tears had smeared the eyeblack down her face in pitiable streaks. She sat with her head down, huddled up in a

## CAIRO

flowered silk kimono. She even made no move, as the *Madame* turned back its wide sleeve, to display livid yellow and blue bruises on the slender, childish, white arms.

She said something to the *felláhin*, who exclaimed and stared. None of the police paid any attention. The one who had brought the two women in, had joined his tooth-picking comrade in the doorway. The officials were still industriously writing at the desks. I was trying to interpret the drama, which was just so much dumb show to me, when there was a sound of loud, angry voices outside the door.

Some of the voices were obviously English, and Cockney at that. The noise became so loud that the two policemen roused themselves, and peered out. The *Madame* and the *felláhin* turned towards the door, even the officials looked up. Only the girl remained, apparently unhearing and indifferent.

There was a prolonged swearing, and three English sailors fell into the room, followed by six Egyptian policemen. All nine faces had suffered damage, and in addition the sailors' clothes torn, and covered with blood.

"Tikes more than two muckin' niggers ter tackle an Englishman," said the ginger-haired sailor, who did most of the talking. With that, he picked up the inkpot from the table, and flung it violently at one of the officials at the far end of the room. It flew over my head, showering ink as it went, and crashed against the wall. In the meantime, the second sailor had picked up the table itself. He was just preparing to use it as a battering ram, when all eight policemen

## EAST OF ATHENS

threw themselves on him. Ginger dashed to his rescue, calling to the third sailor to come on. This one, however, was so drunk that he had collapsed in a corner, where he lay, retching and groaning.

The fight was brief. Overwhelmed by the weight of numbers, the two sailors were soon pinioned to the floor. Suddenly they seemed to give up all idea of fighting, and allowed themselves to be picked up like sacks, and dumped on a bench opposite the women and the *felláhn*. The brown girl had joined these now, and they all sat huddled together as if for mutual protection.

All was quiet again for a moment, and looking over, I caught Ginger's eye. "You're British, ain't yer?" he asked. I nodded. "Lot o' bleeders, ain't they?" He gave a crooked grin. "Y'ain't got a fag, 'ave yer?" I nodded again, and passed over my case. The brown girl jumped up, and helped herself too. "You sailor man?" she asked. "Garn, monkey fice," said Ginger, "no more niggers ter night." Quick as a flash, the girl's hand shot out, and slapped him hard across the mouth. He swore vigorously, and one of the policemen jumped up, and caught the girl by the back of the neck.

I thought the fight was going to be on again. But just as things were starting, a sharp voice rapped out an order. Looking across, I saw a short, stockily-built, fair-haired man in the doorway. "Quit all that racket!" he ordered, coming into the room. "I'll deal with you people in a minute." He crossed over to the railing, and spoke to the official whom I had tried to deal with. Then he turned to me. "What's the

## CAIRO

trouble?" he asked. I explained what had brought me there, and he interpreted to the Egyptian, who wrote steadily. He asked me minute details, and told me that various forms would have to be filled up and signed.

The forms seemed endless. The hands of the clock crawled to four, to ten past four, to twenty past, before everything was signed and stamped. I yawned until my jaws ached. The three sailors were snoring. The *Madame*, the girl, and the two *felláhin* were all asleep, supporting each other precariously. Even the policemen, propped against the doorway, seemed asleep. The brown girl had disappeared. Only the hands of the officials moved; writing, blotting, stamping.

When I got out into the street at last, it was already dawn. With eyes half closed, I staggered back to the hotel. The proprietor was waiting for me in the hall. "What have you done?" he cried, as I went in. "The police have just arrested my porter!"



## CHAPTER TEN

### CAIRO, PORT SAID

I SLEPT late, but eventually had to arouse myself, as we had a busy morning ahead. Also we had a tea engagement for the afternoon. We did not know many people in Cairo, and the few that we did know were all away for the summer. However, we had met someone just before leaving Cyprus, who had made us promise that we would go out to see his house at Boulac. He knew that we were interested in gardens, and his was one of the best in Cairo. He had lent the house to a retired Naval Commander, whom we also knew slightly. We were to ring up this Commander Muffet, we were told, and invite ourselves out to tea. We had done so the previous evening, and now were due out at Boulac at four o'clock.

We inquired at the hotel, how to get there. We must take the tram to the *Pont des Anglais*, we were told, and we would be right beside it. If we started about half past three, we would be there in plenty of time. Following these instructions, four o'clock found us jolting along the embankment in a tram. Below, on our left, the Nile flowed muddily past the shuttered houseboats. The light glittered on its brown surface, as on a lustre plate.

It was after four when we reached the *Pont des Anglais*, and the heat was rising in waves from the

## CAIRO, PORT SAID

pavement. There were some carriages near the bridge, but having been told that our destination was only a minute or two away, we did not take one. How we wished that we had! After about ten minutes we almost turned back for one. We inquired from a passer-by, and were waved on with an encouraging two or three minutes further.

After another ten minutes, however, we were still walking, dusty, hot and cross. We had gone too far now to turn back, and ahead there was no sign of carriage, car, or in fact any vehicle. "Boulac," we said hopefully to a man squatting in a doorway. He waved us on, up the long dusty road, and mumbled something incomprehensible. There was nothing for it but to go on. If we eventually got there, we might have some chance of finding a carriage to come back. To turn now, with that wilderness of dust behind us, was unthinkable.

So on we plodded, past a long canal of foetid, green slime. Women were squatting on the bank, carefully washing lettuces. I realized then, why Anglo-Egyptians are so careful to rinse their fruit and vegetables in a potassium permanganate solution.

At five o'clock we reached a railway line, and a tiny station marked: Boulac. Oh, that we had come by train! We crossed the line. Beyond were gardens and away in the distance a glimpse of the Pyramids. After two mistakes, we at last found the house. Commander Muffet had given us up. He had never, he declared, heard of an Englishwoman walking from the *Pont des Anglais* to Boulac on a summer afternoon. M. had created a record, but didn't care; all she wanted was tea.

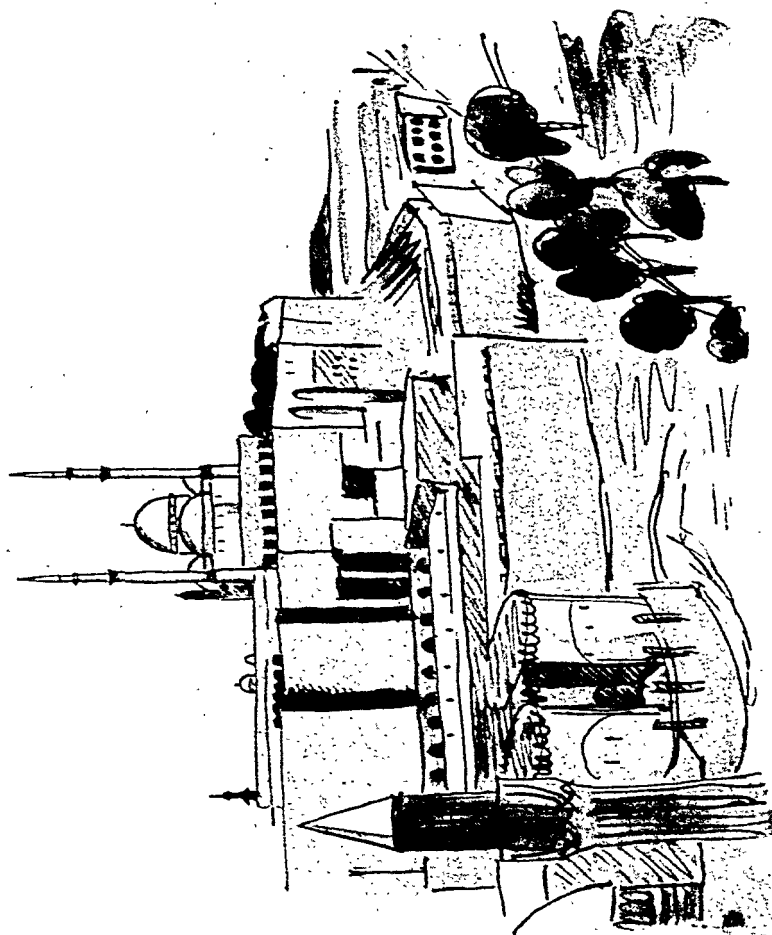
## EAST OF ATHENS

The house was charming, full of beautiful furniture, and valuable Persian rugs. It had been lent to Commander Muffet for the summer, complete with servants and a car. He was thinking of leaving, however, he said, as he found having to buy his own food to be too expensive. He told us exactly how much the cake we were eating cost. He never bought a cake for himself, he said. However, remembering the number of times he had dropped in on us in Cyprus just at tea time, we ate on unabashed.

As soon as we were finished, he asked if we would like to see the garden, as he had to go into Cairo at six. As it was then a quarter to the hour, and that was what we had come to see, we thought it would be a good idea. We had hardly been in a fit state to notice it when we arrived, but now we saw that the garden was as delightful as the house.

Shady and cool, lawns of perfectly-kept grass, a thing unknown in Cyprus, sloped down to a small lake. Round its edge were tall trees, and flowering shrubs, roses and oleanders and hibiscus. Great clumps of cannas flickered like red and yellow flames, in the patches of sunlight. Pigeons strutted across the grass, and called from the branches of the trees. The garden might have been a hundred miles from any city. Had we been able to stay a while, it would have been worth even that hot and dusty walk. But Commander Muffet was impatient to go, and a brief glimpse had to suffice.

On the drive back to Cairo I told him about the theft of the suitcase. I must go and see a certain highly placed English official, X pasha, he said immediately. I had only to tell X. pasha that I came from Commander



CAIRO CITADEL

## CAIRO, PORT SAID

Muffet, and the whole of the Egyptian Police Force would be at my disposal. Well knowing what a 'pull' in the right quarter will do, I thanked him, and said I would see X. pasha the next morning.

I had to go back again to the police station that night—sometime after midnight, in order to see the same people. Until then there was nothing much to do. The hotel proprietor was sulking on account of his arrested porter. I didn't think the boy was guilty, myself, and said I would do my best to have him released. When I got to the police station, however, I found that that was going to be no easy matter. The police were very pleased at having made such a prompt arrest. The boy had protested his innocence, and accused the cab driver. I was inclined to agree with him. The police, however, wanted me to make my accusation against the bird in hand. They showed no eagerness to look for the driver. With X. pasha in mind, I didn't press the matter, but decided to wait until the next morning.

X. pasha's office was in another police station, away beyond the Opera House. I went there fairly early, and sent in my card, with 'From Commander Muffet' written on the back. In a few minutes I was shown in. X. pasha was a tall, soldierly, middle-aged man. He gave me a chair, and asked me what he could do for me. He should perhaps first tell me that he had no idea who Commander Muffet was, he added. In embarrassment, I explained what had happened. X. pasha said it didn't matter at all, he was just as willing to help me if he could. He didn't hold out much hope of recovering the suitcase, but said that he

## EAST OF ATHENS

would certainly telephone and have the porter released. I never did recover the suitcase, but the boy was back at the hotel when I returned. So X. pasha was as good as his word.

I had to pay two more brief visits to the police station. It was also suggested that we should visit a big open air market, in case any of the clothes were exposed for sale there. Had they been, I doubt whether I should have cared to have had them back. However, it might have led to tracing the thieves. But though we explored the market on several occasions, we never saw a trace of our belongings.

We also visited the famous Muski bazaar. There was a sad mixture of Brummagem, and cheap oriental goods on view. The better stuff seemed only to be brought out when all the trash had definitely been turned down. We wandered on along dusty, garbage-strewn streets of crumbling houses, to where the twin minarets of the citadel mosque were flung against the sky. We spent a day at the Museum, where the Tut-ankh-amûn remains were still the focus of general interest. To my mind, in spite of the fine workmanship, its very elaborateness gave the jewellery something of a spurious appearance. If it did not look so obviously 'Wille Clarkson' as the jewellery at the Persian Exhibition at Burlington House some years ago, there was still, one felt, something wrong somewhere. Beside some of the other exhibits, mummy case, and jewels had a flimsy, meretricious air.

We intended to spend a few days in Port Saïd on our way back to Cyprus. Now our last afternoon in Cairo had arrived, and we hadn't yet visited the Pyramids.

Our first trip could hardly count. The hotel proprietor was most upset. "*Tous les touristes*," he assured us visited the Pyramids. Torn between sleep and sightseeing, we looked out at the hot streets. "We'd better go," I said. "We can sleep to-morrow." So in the interests of *le tourisme*, we crawled out into the heat, and climbed on a tram.

The journey was very long, very hot, and very uncomfortable. Several times we wished we hadn't started. We rattled past the *Mena House Hotel*, and gazed with vitiated eyes at the Pyramids. As we got out of the tram, two guides, resplendent in silk kaftans and gubbehs, approached us hopefully. When we waved them away, however, they didn't seem sorry, but retired unprotesting, to the shade once more.

The camel boys weren't so easily disposed of. Goodness knows, I didn't want to walk in that heat; but even less did I want to ride on one of those camels. Bony, mangy, and accustomed to carrying stones, when not carrying tourists, they bore but a remote resemblance to the *thelûls* of Arabia. But as we walked on steadily, the boys, being encumbered with camels, soon gave up the pursuit.

Stumbling among boulders, we reached the base of what, we supposed, was the Great Pyramid. The glare was blinding, and the heat came in thick waves from the mass of stone.

Ahead of us, a group of English tourists, with sunshades and pith helmets, was bravely plodding after a guide. Dutifully, it stopped and gazed, when stopping and gazing seemed to be indicated. "Climb pyramid!" said a voice in my ear. I shook my head, without

## EAST OF ATHENS

looking Surely it was enough to be walking round the beastly thing in this heat "Climb pyramid, very good," repeated the voice Still we paid no attention. "Buy jewellery, you wife Egyptian jewellery, very old All Egyptian silver" The voice grew fainter as we hurried on "*Sehr schone bilder, sehr schmutzig,*" came to us a despairing cry, as we turned the third angle of the Pyramid

"Oughtn't we to see the Sphinx?" said M feebly "Do you really want to?" I asked in reply She shook her head emphatically Neither did I We had suffered enough for *le tourisme*, I considered Flesh and blood could stand no more, and anyhow, it wasn't going to be asked to

We crawled back through the dust and flies, to the *Mena House*, and sank exhausted into two chairs beside the swimming pool The water looked tempting, but I'm never really keen on swimming in other peoples baths It was enough relief to sit in the shade, and be occasionally splashed by the divers To wonder, too, whether we'd created a record in visiting the Pyramids, but not the Sphinx. Perhaps we had a traveller's tale to tell after all

We went back to Port Saïd by train If the journey to Cairo had been bad, this was infinitely worse Now, in addition to the heat and dust, we had to contend with the soot, which soon laid a black film over everything We thought gratefully of Mr Philipescu

The hotels in Port Saïd are not good We had been recommended to go to some English *pension* The fact that it was a good way out along the beach, com-



## CAIRO, PORT SAID

bined with the fact that we were never very keen on going there, decided us against it. A room, and the possibility of eating when and where we liked, sounded more attractive. We chose an hotel on the *boulevard*. It was on the opposite corner to the restaurant where we had lunched with Mr. Philipescu, the day we landed. The rooms were large, and had balconies over the street.

It was hotter even than in Cairo; or possibly only seemed hotter on account of the damp. The actual temperature varied little between day and night. One's clothes clung stickily, as in the tropics. At night everything, the walls, tables, chairs, rails of the balcony, was not merely damp, but actually ran with moisture. The first evening we walked out along the pier, which terminates the canal, and separates it from the beach. It was like passing through a steam bath. We came back soaked to the skin.

The rest of the evening we spent sitting out on our balcony. Sleep was out of the question. Below us, and on two of the other corners were *cafés*, and each *café* had an orchestra. Their musical tastes, however, were very dissimilar. Whereas one was devoted to Italian opera, the second was definitely Wagnerian, and the third played only out-of-date American jazz.

Had they been willing to take it in turns, all might have been well. Each band, however, was determined to play all the time. The resulting sound, when the *Pilgrim's Chorus*, from *Tannhäuser*, was played at the same time as *E lucevan le Stelle*, and *Sonny Boy*, surpassed the cacophonists' wildest dreams. Puccini won by a short neck, possibly because the Wagnerians had

## EAST OF ATHENS

only a string orchestra, and a piano We sat on, fascinated After all there was not much to do in Port Saïd except bathe, and such an orchestral contest was something of a novelty

We spent the days on the long, sandy beach Sweltering, multi-coloured humanity lay tightly packed, from the pier right into the far distance We splashed occasionally into the tepid, sandy water, and came out feeling gritty, and hotter than before we went in The evenings we passed wandering about, looking in at the brightly-lit shops of the few main streets, and once exploring the ill paved, worse lit, native quarter Twice we were offered beautiful embroidered coats to take back with us to Cyprus, and "send the money if we liked them" The dealers in Port Saïd claim that they can always tell to whom they can safely give goods on credit, and are practically never deceived But we refused to be tempted

One evening I looked up a Greek boy from the Dodecanese, whom I had met two years before He had given me my first lessons in Greek, and was anxious to see what progress I had made He had been a sailor when I first knew him Now I found that he had joined the Egyptian Secret Police, and was sorry he hadn't been in Cairo to trace the stolen suitcase

We sat late into the night at a *café*, driving away the minute shoeblacks, who even crawl under the chairs, in order to grab one's feet, and the small boys who produce live chickens out of their garments, with loud cries of *gouilly gouilly* We were not soft-hearted tourists, to be inveigled into paying for the release of a chicken We knew too well that it would promptly be re-

## CAIRO, PORT SAID

captured as soon as the money had changed hands. But the boys had to keep their hands in, I suppose. Tourists do not, as a rule, stay at Port Saïd; but the arrival of a great liner on her way through the canal, brings out the guides and touts in their hundreds.

These last few days had been slack. A small *Deutsch Ost Afrika* boat had been the most important arrival. But as we went out in the launch to the ship that was to take us back to Cyprus, we passed a great P. & O., edging her way to the dock. Its rails were lined with passengers, eagerly gazing at the town.

On shore the guides, the touts, the sellers of *loucoum*, of genuine Egyptian jewellery from Birmingham, the bootblacks, and the little boys with the chickens gazed back, and licked their lips.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### ATHENS

THE following January found me back in Athens en route for Rome. As this was M's first visit, we decided to stay a week or so, and take up various introductions. It was very cold and wet, and we felt it badly after the sunshine of Rhodes, where we had spent the past six months. We both promptly got heavy colds which kept us in bed for two or three days, and made us put off leaving for longer than we had planned. Luckily our colds did not exactly coincide, though they overlapped. Luckily, for we were staying in an hotel which only provided bed and breakfast, so that the hale member of the family was obliged to go out and bring in food for the sick one! This was easy enough as we were down in the business end of the town, in fact, in the same hotel which I had discovered on my first visit.

On the opposite side of the street were several of the small taverns with which Athens abounds. In these taverns, all the cooking is done in front of the customers, in fact, in many cases right in the entrance, in full view of the passers-by. Immense copper cauldrons send out a variety of savoury odours, and sometimes in the more pretentious establishments, a whole carcase will be slowly turning on a spit, over a charcoal fire.

One goes in and raises the lids of the casseroles,

## ATHENS

peering and sniffing at their various contents, which one may take away if one likes to pay a deposit on the cutlery. M. and I fed one another from a tavern right opposite the hotel, and as the food was quite good and the price ridiculously cheap, we eat there several times after.

In Athens one often comes across itinerant musicians, who make the round of the *cafés* and taverns. They play, sometimes quite well, a variety of instruments from concertinas to fiddles. Having given two or three numbers, they pass round the hat, and go on to the next *café*. The first night I dined at this particular tavern a fiddler came in. Standing at the back of the crowded room, he played some tantalizing gipsy music which set all our feet shuffling. He was loudly applauded, and made the rounds, hat in hand. When he reached my table, I gave him a drachma, which is rather less than a halfpenny at the present rate of exchange, though, of course, its buying power is much greater in Greece. Thanking me politely, he handed me back half a drachma change, and passed on to the next table.

I was only on one other occasion offered change under similar circumstances, and that too was in Greece. I was walking one day in Corfu, when a beggar asked me for fifty lepta, or half a drachma. "I only have a drachma," I said. "All right," said the beggar promptly, "I'll give you change!"

The spell of fine weather which brought out all the street vendors and musicians, cleared up our colds as well. We determined to pay a round of calls, and then leave by the boat at the end of the next week.

## EAST OF ATHENS

We had been carrying round for a long time a couple of letters of introduction. One of these was to a Mr Strawe, from a friend of ours who had known him in his younger days in Paris. He hadn't seen him for several years, but knew that he lived permanently in Athens. We inquired his address from the British Consul, who was vague and slightly evasive. Eventually, however, we were told that he had just moved into a new flat near the British School. There was some difficulty about finding the exact address. At last we inquired from an Englishwoman, who had lived *most of her life in Athens*. When she had told us how to find the house, we asked her whether she knew Mr Strawe, and what he was like.

"Well," she said, raising her eyebrows. "He's a gentleman who's seen life in more ways than one. I wonder if you'll meet the policeman!" We pressed her to be more detailed, but she evidently felt that she had already said too much, and that was all we could get out of her. The gentleman having thus been surrounded with a slight air of mystery, we looked forward to the possibility of an amusing visit.

The next afternoon, therefore, found us knocking at a discreet green door tucked away in a side street, just above the schools. After a few minutes delay, we heard shuffling footsteps and the door was opened. A little, thin, ferrety man peered out at us inquiringly and a trifle suspiciously. I asked if this was Mr Strawe's house. He admitted, rather reluctantly, I thought, that it was. Was Mr Strawe in? Yes, he said. We were addressing Mr Strawe. What could he do for us?

## ATHENS

We introduced ourselves, and I said that we had a letter of introduction from his friend Mr. Bishop of Paris. This information didn't seem to arouse any enthusiasm, but after a few moments hesitation, he asked us to come in.

The flat was rather dark, and had the air of being luxuriously, if perhaps a trifle too elaborately, furnished. In the dim light we could see that the walls were thickly hung with Byzantine eikons. Mr. Strawe asked us to sit down while he went in to see his friend. His friend was lying down, he explained. They had been on the beach all morning, and he thought he had a touch of the sun. We wondered if this was the policeman whom we might be expected to meet, and if so, whether he was being warned to keep out of sight while strange visitors were about.

In the meantime I looked in my pocket to get out the letter of introduction. To my annoyance I found that I must have left it in the hotel. Anyhow, I thought, Strawe knows Bishop, and I can give him the letter next time I see him.

There was a long delay and a lot of muttering of voices. At last, however, Mr. Strawe reappeared carrying a tray with some liqueur glasses and a bottle of *crème de menthe*. Pouring out three glasses, he offered one to each of us. M. shot me a reproachful glance, but manners triumphing over distaste, sipped politely.

When we were all settled, Mr. Strawe looked at me inquiringly. I hastened to explain about the letter. I said that if he liked, I would send it along the next day; but he just raised his eyebrows. "And who is this mutual friend we're *supposed* to have?" he asked.

## EAST OF ATHENS

It was now our turn to raise an eyebrow. We gave the information asked for. "Oh, you mean the Bishop who was *attache* at the Embassy?" We reluctantly explained that this was not the case. "Well, I don't know who it can be then," he said rather snappily. "I'm sure that was the only Bishop I knew in Paris."

This seemed to close the subject. I finished the *creme de menthe*, never my favourite tipple, especially at tea time, with an heroic effort. The silence was becoming oppressive. I had got to the state where I couldn't think of a single thing to say. I was just trying to catch M's eye to go, when Mr Strawe demanded suddenly "I suppose you're staying at the G B?" The G B, I should explain, is the accepted Athenian abbreviation for the *Hotel de la Grande Bretagne*, Athens' most expensive hotel. We had again to explain reluctantly that he was wrong, our *caravanserai* was much more humble. "Oh," said Mr Strawe disapprovingly, "I think I know where you mean. I pass it sometimes." "Yes," said I helpfully. "Yes," said Mr Strawe. Once more the discussion seemed closed. M was putting on her gloves, when "I used to be S S man to King Constantine," said Mr Strawe suddenly. "What's that?" I asked. "Secret service man, secret service man," said Mr. Strawe curtly.

At last a subject of conversation. This seemed to demand some comment, I decided hopefully. I asked if he knew Compton Mackenzie, whose *Atheman Memories* I was just reading in their proper setting. This didn't seem a happy topic either, Mr Strawe definitely didn't approve of Mr Mackenzie. However,



## ATHENS

by virtue of this disapproval, for a while the conversation struggled on. By devious routes it arrived at how one lost touch with people in England, if one lived too long abroad.

"I've lost touch with so many people," said Mr. Strawe. Now when I go to England, I just go and stay with the Guinness', or Lord So and So or the Duchess of Something, I hardly know anyone else these days." I caught M.'s eye and winked; but perhaps I was being unjust. Quite recently I was talking to a young peer, who was just back from a visit to Athens. Finding that I knew that city, the first person whom he mentioned was Mr. Strawe. Such a nice little man. Well, well, one never knows.

At any rate inspired by this topic, Mr. Strawe talked on happily for a while.

The next time the conversation flagged, we really did get moving. We bore away with us an invitation to dinner at the end of the week, to be confirmed by letter later. I admit I hadn't much faith in that invitation. As I expected, the letter of confirmation never arrived, though I duly forwarded the missing introduction. We saw Mr. Strawe several times after this. He was always looking at something in the far distance when we passed, and we weren't sufficiently interested to disturb him.

It was shortly after this visit, and just before we were due to leave, that we were disturbed one night by a series of loud reports. We didn't pay much attention to them, putting them down to Carnival activity; nor apparently did anyone else. It was only in the morning that we noticed an air of suppressed

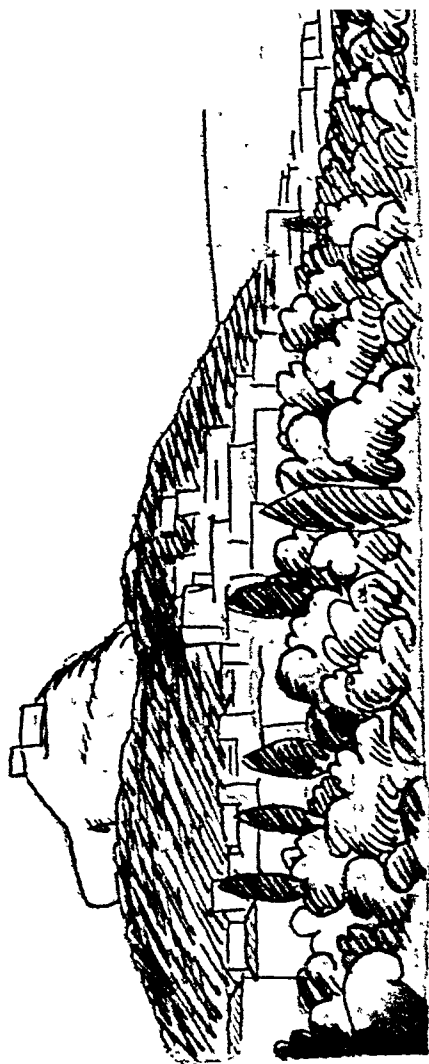
## EAST OF ATHENS

excitement. Everyone was eagerly reading newspapers. It was quite a time before I could get any account, and then not a very coherent one, of what was happening.

It appeared that there was an army revolt of Venezilist sympathizers. They had fired off shells over the city from the barracks on Mount Lycabettus. This was the noise we had heard the night before. We were told that the officers of the *Averof* and some other warships were in league with the rebels, and had taken their ships to Crete—that M. Venezilos was at the back of it—that M. Venezilos didn't approve of it—that Mme. Venezilos was responsible—that it had come off too early, too late, rumours surged backward and forward.

But after the first few days, to all outward appearance, calm settled over the city. Except for always having their noses buried in a newspaper, the Athenians seemed to have lost interest in the war, which had transferred itself to the neighbourhood of Salonika. But this lack of interest can only have been seeming. There can have been few families who had nobody involved on one side or the other. And if the revolt was unsuccessful, there was always the spectre of a blank wall at dawn for the rebel officers at least.

We were afforded a little amusement at this time by the arrival of one of the more sensational London dailies. This had sent out a non-Greek-speaking correspondent to Athens to write up the rebellion. He, being completely ignorant of the language, was at the mercy of interpreters. Not knowing where to go or whom to see, and finding Athens completely peaceful, he had had to draw on his imagination. He had



ATHENS: MT. LYCABETTUS

## ATHENS

written a most lurid and fantastic fiction, which he knew quite well that the Greek censor would never pass Undeterred, he had taken it over the border into Yugoslavia and sent it from there. We were all rather amused, if disgusted. The Greek authorities, however, were furious.

But, if peaceful, Athens had also become very dull. There was curfew at night, and the *cafés* and cinemas were all shut. There was nothing to do in the evening but go to bed. The taxis had all been taken off the streets; to prevent them being used as armoured cars, we were told. So at least one was spared their hooting.

Rumours of fighting reached us from Macedonia, particularly from Kavalla, where there were large American interests. Our American friends gave us graphic descriptions of what their authorities would and would not do, if any American property was damaged. The British didn't seem so sure about their interests being cared for. But then, one can't live long in Athens without hearing some pungent comments on the activities of the Foreign Office.

Owing to the peculiarity of British diplomatic methods, there was nobody at the Legation who could speak Greek. If one excepts, that is, one man not in the Diplomatic Service, who was just due to retire. If anyone there learnt Greek they were immediately transferred to some country, say, Norway, where Greek would be of no use to them. This is called keeping an open mind!

It was typical of this attitude that the British Minister at Belgrade had just been moved to Lisbon. Being a great personal friend of Prince Paul, the Regent of

## EAST OF ATHENS

Yugoslavia, he had been in an ideal position to forward British interests in that country. This was evidently considered a good reason for sending him to Portugal.

The general opinion in Athens at this time, seemed to be that Tsaldaris was a nonentity. At the same time it was felt that Venezilos had made a foolish move. A move unworthy of such a cunning old fox. General Kondilyis was regarded as the strong man who would save the Government. If his health allowed, that was, for he was reported to be very ill. People's faith in him was justified, and after Venezilos' flight to Rhodes, Kondilyis was accorded a triumphal entry into Athens. Whether we liked or not, we were forced to stay for it, as it was still impossible to obtain permits to leave Greece. But before the great day arrived reaction seemed to have set in after the tension of the past weeks.

The streets were lined by troops with fixed bayonets. Behind them an orderly, almost lethargic seeming crowd, thronged the pavements. With a roar of exhausts, outriders on motor-cycles appeared. Following them were motor cars filled with officers, which raced along the street. The crowd stared quietly. Then there was a little desultory cheering, and the crowd quietly dispersed. I was reminded of Kemal's visit to St. Sophia both by the similarity of the procession and the behaviour of the crowds. There was, I felt, a temperamental kinship.

Now that the rebellion was over, there seemed some hope that we might really be able to get away at last, if only the boats started running again. On inquiring we found that there was a boat leaving for Brindisi

## ATHENS

via Corfu, on the nineteenth of March. First, however, we must get permits to go. This meant a day spent between the British Consulate and the Ministry of the Interior. At the British Consulate we had to get a request addressed to the Hellenic Ministry of the Interior, asking them to give us permits to leave Greece. This was written in English, and I wondered what *our* Home Office would say if it was sent letters in Greek!

Then we had to go to the Ministry itself, where various stamps and writings were added. After all of which elaborate precautions we were safely landed in Brindisi without ever having had to show them.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### CORFU

**B**UT what a journey that was! We arrived down at the Piræus early, and went on board. We had only deck tickets, but found that it was really too cold to stay up on top. However, as this was one of the larger boats, there was a sort of upper hold, or store room outside the galley. This had a wide shelf round the sides, where the deck passengers could sleep. We chose a place opposite the galley door, in order to get the benefit of the heat, and settled ourselves and our belongings on the shelf.

We could hardly have chosen a worse spot. About half an hour before we were due to leave hundreds of men arrived on board. They streamed down the narrow ladder, and clambered up on to our shelf. Closer and closer we squeezed, until not another person would fit. As more continued to arrive, they had to spread themselves about among the clinkers on the floor.

These men, we found, were conscripts who had been called up from Corfu and Cephalonia, to fight against the Venezilists. They were now being sent back to their homes. Most of them were very young, very ragged, and very cheery. They had regarded it all as the greatest fun. Many of the Greeks never leave their homes except during their period of military service. This was a little bit of extra excitement for them.

## CORFU

As the evening wore on, the atmosphere grew thicker and thicker. The heat from the crowded soldiers was increased by the galley fires. Waves of steam and the smoke of frying oil poured out during the preparation of the first and second class dinners. I suggested to M. that she should really transfer to the second class. But having put up with so much already, she was determined to go on with it. She was unwilling to retract her deck travelling principles even with the smell of burning flesh in her nostrils.

Squashed up against me on the other side, was a young Egyptian journalist. He had been 'covering' the rebellion in Athens, and was now on his way to Germany. To the intense amusement of the Greeks, he took off his shoes and socks, and put on a long white kaftan over his suit. When he lay back to sleep, one of them put pieces of torn paper between his toes. This woke him in a fury of indignation. "*C'est pas gentil, c'est pas gentil*," he cried, almost in tears; and then broke out into a flood of Arabic; which, not being understood, created even more diversion.

At last, when the atmosphere became too poisonous to bear any longer, I struggled up on deck. We were passing through the Corinth Canal. Right in front of me, an immense cliff shot up into the sky. It was so close, and so high that I had to crane my neck to glimpse the stars. On the other side of the ship, it was the same. Looking in each direction, we seemed to be travelling through a colossal, high walled corridor. At intervals, lights shone from the foot of the cliffs, and a narrow road, or tow-path stretched away into the darkness. The effect in the dim light was overwhelm-



## EAST OF ATHENS

ing It was as if the tall cliffs were going to close in over our heads Dizzy, I shut my eyes against the onrush of the walls

In a few minutes, the cliffs became lower, dropping away rapidly at the end, as we reached the edge of the Gulf of Patras Only the endless vista of twinkling lights still remained. In my interest, I hadn't noticed the cold Now I was glad to go below again, fug or no fug I stumbled blindly in the half-light among the huddled figures, which littered every inch of space I was fighting my way as much through atmosphere, as people

It was daylight when we reached Patras, a damp chilly morning, with a white mist hanging over the water The lower slopes of the mountains were shrouded, so that the distant peaks seemed to float in a sea of vapour The strong arc-lights, which were still switched on on the pier, accentuated the feeling of greyness and cold A number of the conscripts were landed here There were crowds of their womenfolk on the dock to meet them As we anchored, more and more could be seen streaming down from the narrow streets of the bare white town

It was a relief to get rid of some of our passengers, and to be able to move about a bit But still the hold and deck were strewn with sleeping figures Presently the sun rose and warmed us a little, and the mists began to lift All the time we were passing through the Gulf of Patras, however, thin streamers of white vapour clung to the distant coast

As soon as the sun became really hot, everybody came out on deck, and settled themselves on the

## CORFU

hatches. The sea was like glass. The ship glided, almost imperceptibly past the bare grey and violet tinted shores. In the group next us was a fair-haired boy in a trench coat; we thought at first that he was English. After a while we got into conversation, and found him to be half Greek, and half French. Iorgos was his name, he told us. He had a Maltese half-brother who worked as a clerk at the British Consulate in Corfu.

Iorgos was very friendly and entertaining. He was eager to show us the sights of Corfu, where we thought of breaking our journey for two or three days. We were due to arrive about four o'clock, but it was already three o'clock when we were passing Paxos and Antipaxos, the two little islands which hang from Corfu's tail. Corfu itself was still only a long strip of greenish grey in the distance. An hour later we could just, by straining our eyes, define the bulk of the old citadel, jutting out into the sea.

It was already dusk, when we ran under the tall, narrow houses which topped the sea wall. Beyond these, the ground dropped to the lower town of the harbour front, and the streets running behind it. Then it rose again abruptly, to where the ruins of another citadel towered over the town. Underneath the citadel was a hideous brick building. The police station, Iorgos told us. A relic of the British occupation, it had, I discovered, a Victorian bedroom fire-place in every room. Next to it was a little whitewashed Greek chapel, and priest's house. The acme of the picturesque and charming, these, at least by comparison.

Iorgos shepherded us into a rowboat. He would

## EAST OF ATHENS

show us the hotel to stay at, he said, and arrange about our baggage. We had with us among other things, a basket with a badly fitting lid. Already on the boat, several inquisitive people had pulled it further open to look inside. Now as we landed, yet another man came up and did the same. M. in exasperation pushed him aside, and slammed on the lid more firmly. Iorgos looked at her in consternation. "That was the Customs Officer," he whispered agitatedly. But the Customs Officer was evidently too surprised to do anything about it. He disappeared, and we never saw him again.

Outside the Customs House were crowds of porters and taxis. There was also a row of decrepit one horse carriages. Iorgos hailed one of these, bowed us in, and jumped in himself after us. The driver flourished his whip, with bloodcurdling yells. The dejected looking horse pricked up one ear, and off we started.

Iorgos had given our baggage to a porter with a truck. Now with some alarm, we saw this disappearing in the opposite direction. However, Iorgos assured us that the porter was merely taking a short cut. We should all meet at the hotel.

Our carriage climbed the road which ran along the top of the sea wall. In the dusk, the tall shabby houses, with their streaked and flaking stucco, had a melancholy air of decayed gentility. Even their faded green shutters seemed like tired eyes. A street of broad steps branched off uphill. Grass grew thickly between its paving stones. Once we had left the quay, there were few people about, a loungee or two leaning over the sea wall gazing at the ship, or a strolling couple.

## CORFU

The road turned to the right, still climbing slightly. Iorgos pointed out the dark bulk of the Museum, among the trees ahead. It had been the Royal Palace under the monarchy, he told us, and before that, the residence of the British High Commissioner. He took me to visit it a day or two later. The Throne Room was well proportioned, and still dignified despite the threadbare carpet, and dusty hangings. Otherwise, save for the pediment of the archaic Temple of Gorgo, the museum was given over to an amazing collection of Japanese junk, of which the less said the better. Gorgo, however, is well worth a visit. She dances upon her pediment, an amusingly Asiatic, Krishna-like figure.

We drove across a corner of the long tree-lined Plateia, down a narrow street, and then stopped. Our baggage had already arrived, and Iorgos ushered us in. The hotel was primitive, but appeared at least clean. There was a splendid view across the Plateia to the citadel, and out to sea. Away in the distance, the snow-caps of the Albanian Mountains still showed a faint pink. Underneath our windows was evidently the fashionable promenade. Crowds of young men and girls were strolling backwards and forwards or sitting at little tables under the trees. In nearly every case, the sexes were segregated. The men and girls kept to their separate groups, and merely called out remarks to one another as they passed.

When we had washed and changed we went down to have a drink, and to find somewhere to dine. We had promised to meet Iorgos again later in the evening, after he had shown himself to his family. We found a

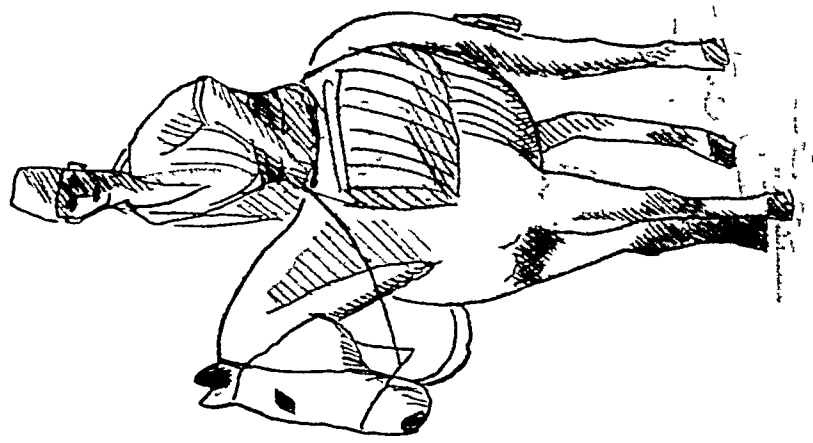
## EAST OF ATHENS

little restaurant nearly opposite the hotel. It was run by yet another Greek-American. He had come back a year or two previously, and put his dollar savings into this business in his home town. His food was tolerable, but the restaurant had the same melancholy air which seemed to pervade the whole of the town. We wondered if there was anywhere cheerier to go, but there didn't seem to be much choice. In the eight months which we afterwards spent in Corfu, we only found one other possible restaurant.

After dinner Iorgos joined us at a *café* in the arcade under the hotel. This arcade ran the entire length of one side of the Plateia. We watched the promenaders, noticing how well dressed most of the townspeople were, the men mostly in whites, and the women in smart dresses. Of course in a way this was understandable, as the decay of Corfu is of fairly recent date. Before the building of the branch line to Athens, nearly all Greek traffic passed through Corfu. It was then one of the busiest towns in Greece. Before the War, too, when the ex-Kaiser stayed at the *Achilleion*, and the Greek Court visited the city, it was a city of life and fashion.

Even now it is reputed to have the best society in Greece. We, ourselves, found the Corfuotes charming, and very hospitable. There were a number of Anglo-Greek families, and the atmosphere was intensely pro-British, which was such a welcome change from Cyprus.

Apart from the Anglo-Greek society there were not more than half a dozen English families living in Corfu. So, of course, when we returned later in the



A YOUNG ALBANIAN

## CORFU

year we met them all. The majority of them were younger and less staid than the permanent residents. One of the first people we met was a young writer, who lived with his wife in an isolated village on the other side of the bay. Their house was inaccessible by road during rainy weather, and when it was stormy, was inaccessible altogether, but they did not seem to mind. He had persuaded his mother to come out, bringing with her his sister and two younger brothers. These all lived in a big rambling house about a mile or so from us.

Larry was short, blond and excitable. His favourite author was Rabelais, and his conversation was modelled, obviously, on that of Panurge, with sometimes startling results in mixed company. His wife was tall and slender, with handsome cats' eyes. Being an ex-Slade student, she wore her straight, fair hair cut *à la* Trilby. As her husband once remarked to me: "You've no idea what an arty-arty little bitch Nancy was until I knocked her into shape."

Larry was blessed, or cursed as you will, with a excess of temperament; which was, presumably, the cause of our falling out. We parted one night the best of friends, and met two days later to find that we weren't on speaking terms. I made one or two attempts to solve the mystery, but never succeeded. Although we continued to remain on the best of terms with the rest of his family, I only saw Larry once more before I left Corfu.

On this occasion I was visiting a friend of his, another aspiring author, when he walked in. We did not exchange a word, but both sat, trying to look dig-

## EAST OF ATHENS

nified, and carrying on mutually independent conversations with George. I was highly amused, but determined not to show it. As for George, sitting muffled up in the Albanian sheepskin coat and the skull cap he wore in the cold weather, he put on an extra special version of his usual sardonic expression. Stroking the beard with which he attempted to conceal a youthful chin, he nobly bore the brunt of the two conversations, as Larry and I played the game of sitting one another out. A game which I eventually won.

We lived a couple of miles outside the town, and just beyond us lived two young Americans. They had come to Corfu the previous year on their honeymoon, and had been so delighted with it that they had returned for more. *He had been curator of some museum in the Middle West, I think at St. Louis.* We found them very agreeable, and saw quite a lot of them. Then, without any warning, they left in what appeared to be an atmosphere of mystery.

One night, so the story we heard went, they were aroused by noises outside. Looking out they saw flames shooting up in their garden. They opened the door and ran out. As they did so several shots were fired and bullets whistled over their heads. In the glare of the flames they could not distinguish their assailants. *Not that they waited to do so, for oblivious of the fact that it was a bitter winter's night and that they were clad only in nightdress and pyjamas, they ran about a mile across the fields to the house of some English people who owned a car.* Rousing them, they told their story and begged to be driven to the police station.



## CORFU

Two days later they disappeared from Corfu, and as far as I know the mystery was never satisfactorily solved. At any rate there were no signs of a fire in the garden when I passed a few days after. However it was in the same month that we had an experience, somewhat similar, if not so dramatic seeming as theirs.

We had just locked the door for the night and gone upstairs when there was a thunderous knocking. (Our house, I should add, was fairly isolated.) I opened a window and looked out. Below, I could just distinguish the forms of five or six men. "What do you want?" I called out. There was a muttering of voices, then: "Come down and open the door." I repeated my question. There was more muttering, under cover of which, having the Americans' story still in mind, I closed over the shutters and blew out the lamp. "What do you want?" I asked a third time through the slats. "Come down and open the door, we want money." "You've come to the wrong house," I replied. "Good night." As I spoke, a stone crashed against the shutter, and someone started kicking and hammering at the door. For about twenty minutes the men continued to batter and call out threats and demands for money. Then, complete anti-climax, they suddenly gave it up as a bad job, and stamped muttering away.

However, in the brilliant spring weather of our first visit, even the mildest of bandits, in spite of the nearness of Albania, would have sounded improbable.

The first morning after breakfast, we went to visit the British Consul. A thin, middle-aged man with a nervous manner, we mentally classified him amongst the amiable and obliging consuls. This was a classi-

## EAST OF ATHENS

fication which later proved correct, at least so far as we were concerned. There were, I know, some English there who had nothing but abuse for him. These loudly expressed their bad opinion to all and sundry. As it generally came to the Consul's ears well embroidered, it didn't help to improve matters.

At the Consulate we met Iorgos's half-brother Ginesio, as dark and plump as Iorgos was slim and fair. They asked me to go with them to visit the gardens of *Mon Repos*, the ex-royal villa, as these are one of the show places of the island.

We had arrived during a spell of perfect spring weather, following a wet winter, and Corfu was looking its best. It has, for my taste, too much of a salad landscape. Especially is this so in spring, when the fields and ditches are lush under the heavy evergreens. I missed the sharp delicacy of the Aegean. Outlines were blurred and smudged by the same white mist, which we had noticed in the Gulf of Patras.

But this day the gardens were looking lovely. Pines, myrtles, cypresses, magnolias, and centuries old olive trees were scattered thickly over the slopes. Here and there was an open glade, where the sunlight played on a carpet of wild anemones and narcissus. Near the entrance, the box hedges of what had once been a formal garden, were ragged and overgrown. The villa, too, a simple stucco building like a small English country house, had a sad air of desolation and decay.

But the major charm of *Mon Repos*, as of the *Achilleion*, is the view on a clear evening. The long chains of the Albanian and Epirote Mountains take on indescribable shades of mauve and rose. For perhaps

## CORFU

ten brief minutes, the world is transformed to a glory of colour. Then, so quickly that one might almost imagine that the lights were being switched off on some celestial stage, all fades to grey.

Save for this view, and for its terraced gardens, there is no need to cycle laboriously, as Iorgos and I did, or even to take a car up to the *Achilleion*. The villa was originally built for the Empress Elizabeth of Austria. Some time after her death, it was bought by the ex-Kaiser. Here he came for a few weeks nearly every year before the War. With typically Teutonic thoroughness, the gardens were so planted that they burst into a blaze of flowers on the All Highest's arrival.

From the outside the villa is ugly, while inside, it is hideous. The gardens even, are spoilt to some extent by groups of more than life size Germanic versions of classical Greek statuary. These include the monstrous Achilles, from which the villa takes its name.

From the *Achilleion*, the views are magnificent. In every direction trees cover the hillsides and valleys. Many of these are legacies from Venetian days. Then the law required that every Corfuote who cut down a tree, should plant two others in its stead. Men were honoured, and what is more were practically rewarded, for the trees they planted and cared for. Any man who kept up a grove of a hundred olive trees, received a dozen pieces of gold. If only the French would bring in such a law, the olives of Provence might yet be saved.

We came back down an immensely steep, rocky road. It was on this that the back brake of my hired bicycle decided not to work. The front brake never had worked,

## EAST OF ATHENS

and the ancient machine rattled so much that it was quite unnecessary to have a bell in order to warn anyone of my approach. Now I bounced and bounded down hill over the boulders at a reckless pace "Brakes gone!" I shouted to Iorgos, as I rattled past him "Jump!" he shouted back. So at the first corner I jumped into a clump of myrtle bushes, leaving the machine to crash to its fate over the edge of the road. *I didn't expect to be able to use it again, but it didn't* seem any the worse for its adventure, and except that I had to get off it at every hill, it served me to get back to Corfu.

This steep track, which was the cause of all the trouble, joined the coast road near the Island of Pontikonissi. Tradition says that this was the ship of Ulysses, which the angry Poseidon turned to stone. Moored in the entrance to the ancient Hyallic harbour, it reflects its steep rocks and cypresses in the still water. It is the most familiar and the most be-photographed sight in Corfu.

Perched on top of the little island are a white house and chapel, with a vine-covered terrace. Down by the landing stage are a few ruined outbuildings. The island is church property, and a solitary priest lives in the white house. Out sailing one day with George and his wife, who had a boat, we decided to visit him. We landed at the little jetty and wandered about among the neglected gardens. A recent storm had carried away a large piece of the island, which is gradually disappearing into the sea. The filthy, dirty and ragged priest did showman to the house and chapel, which were in a ruinous condition. There were rumours

## CORFU

that the church authorities were trying to sell the property. But purchasers for Historic Monuments are rare.

In order to get back to the town, we had to take a ferry across to Canone, on the other side of the harbour. The ferry reminded me that Pontekonissi is supposed to have been the model for that old Victorian favourite, Böcklin's *Toteninsel*. A bridge across the mouth of the harbour had been begun some time before. It had collapsed half way, however, and didn't look like ever being finished. On the opposite side, a little white convent was perched out on the end of a stone jetty. Above, the shore rose steeply. A zigzag path led up to where a few houses and a *café* marked the end of the road back to the town.

The roads of Corfu, as well as the water supply, are a relic of the British occupation. With the exception of this road to Canone, however, and the one up to the *Achilleion*, the others have degenerated to mere tracks. They do not look as if they had been mended since 1863, when the islands were handed over to Greece; a gesture singularly unappreciated by the islanders. But a visit to Paleokastritza, or some of the other little bays on the west coast, is worth the damage to the coccyx involved.

The road from Canone took us back past the gates of *Mon Repos*, and along the sweep of Garitza Bay. This, the natives claim, rivals the Bay of Naples; well perhaps! We came at last to the citadel, the *Fortezza vecchia* as it is still called. This old Venetian fort is moss covered and crumbling now. In its day, however, when it was the first Venetian outpost on the trade

## EAST OF ATHENS

route to the East, it must have been fairly impregnable

The rocks rise up sharply from the sea on three sides. On the fourth side, between the town and the fort, a deep moat has been dug. This now serves as a shelter for rowing boats, and other small craft, and as a bathing pool for the little boys of the town. The fort is used as a barracks, but unlike in more war-conscious countries, nobody interferes with visitors. These may wander at will, and if they have the energy, climb to the very summit. From there the view embraces the whole of Corfu, and range after range of the *mainland mountains*, which rise starkly across the few miles of oily sea. On fine evenings every shadow on their lean ribs is microscopically clear.

Albania is so near, even nearer than Italy, and the *Bogey Man*, Mussolini. This makes Italian penetration there a cause for alarm to the Corfuotes. There are over a thousand Italian residents in Corfu, but neither they, or any foreigners are allowed to acquire land there. This law only exists in the border lands of Greece. In Corfu it is aimed against the Italians, in Mitylene, against the Turks, in Macedonia and the Epirus, against their various neighbours. The Greeks don't want penetration, peaceful or otherwise.

The Albanian costume, with its white tarbush, is often to be seen about the town and harbour. It makes a welcome addition to the drab modern costumes worn by most of the Corfuotes. In Corfu, the women more often retain the old costume, than the men. Its most noticeable feature is the broad strip of red cloth, entwined among their hair. These pieces of cloth are

## CORFU

worn from the time a girl is betrothed, until she dies. Often they are supplemented by switches of false hair. These bulge out on all sides from the red lacing, giving her a rather top heavy appearance, while she is still young and slim.

When we got back into the town, Iorgos asked me if I would like to visit the church of St. Spiridion, the Patron Saint of Corfu. Another saint, I remembered vaguely, whose remains, like those of Lazarus, had had a bit of shifting about since his death in fourth-century Cyprus. At the moment, though, I felt much more like a *café* than a church. So St. Spiridion remained unvisited until later in the year, when I happened to be in Corfu for his festival.

His church, for a Greek church, is quite large. These, in general, are small by comparison with the churches of northern and western Europe. Often they are quite tiny. What they lack in size, however, they make up in number. Sometimes mere villages will have scores of chapels. Some of these, it is true, are no larger than shrines, which in many cases they are, being only opened on the name day of the saint.

The Cypriote, however, had a much more elaborate dwelling. Its most notable feature was an ornate eikonostasis, twinkling with gold and silver ornaments, its panels set with highly-coloured eikons. This stretched from floor to ceiling, concealing the third of the church containing the High Altar, from the two-thirds open to the worshippers.

I arrived with some English friends, and their chauffeur, philosopher and friend, Spiro, another American-speaking Greek. The church was packed.

## EAST OF ATHENS

A long queue of people was filing slowly past a crystal casket, in which lay the mummified remains of the saint. As each person reached it, they popped their head through a square box like opening, lined with scarlet silk. After a moment's pause the head was withdrawn, a coin was placed on the salver nearby, and another head took its place.

Spiro had disappeared in the crowd, so I joined the queue. This, I must confess, was mainly out of curiosity as to what was in the hole. When my turn came, I plunged my head in expectantly. Alas, it was so dark inside that I could see nothing. Obviously I couldn't keep my head there indefinitely, for my eyes to become accustomed to the dark. I had to withdraw it at last, curiosity unsatisfied, put my contribution on the plate and move on. It was left for Spiro to explain, with a flash of his multitudinous gold teeth, that the silk-lined hole contained the feet of the mummified saint. These I ought reverently to have kissed.

The amount of kissing that goes on in Greek churches is really amazing. It is a wonder some of the eikons don't get worn away in patches. Many of them, perhaps for this reason, are partly covered with silver or gold sheeting, a very necessary precaution. The famous Annunciation at Tinos, for instance, is so covered with metal and jewels, that only the heads of the Virgin Mary and the Angel Gabriel are visible.

The evening after my visit to *Mon Repos*, the boat arrived which was to take us on to Brindisi. There were practically no deck passengers on board this time, so we decided to go below for the night. Then we discovered to our dismay, that on this boat there was



## CORFU

no below! It was a bitterly cold night, and M. always declares that we walked to Brindisi. There seemed to be no spot sheltered from the piercing wind. We could not sit for more than about ten minutes at a time without becoming frozen.

It must have been about midnight, when I heard the sound of rhythmic chanting from the upper deck. This was accompanied by the steady tap of feet. I climbed up to investigate. The deck was in pitch darkness, but against the lighter sky I could distinguish a circle of dark forms, swaying backwards and forwards. Somebody saw me. Still swaying, the circle opened. Two hands grasped mine and drew me in. Half hypnotized, I listened to the chanted praises of Dionysos. My feet took up the rhythmic, swaying step. And without a word spoken, the dark forms continued to circle round the deck, drawing me with them.

I would like to be able to tell that the ancient Gods had returned for a brief moment to earth, or rather shipboard. For my especial benefit, I would let it be understood. But honesty forbids. Regretfully, I must confess what the light revealed. My Gods became Greek business men returning to the States. *Humanum est errare!* But what their American colleagues would have thought. . . .

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE 'THRANI', HAIFA, TEL AVIV

NOT far from us in Kyrenia lived a young Narchæologist and his wife, with whom we became friendly. They had been excavating for some time in Egypt, but had now come to Cyprus with the idea of settling down. They bought a small house belonging to Commander Muffet, and built on extra rooms. It was some distance from the road, perched on the top of a steep slope, which ran down to a private beach. A magnificent setting for the summer, but as they were to find later not so good when the bad weather came.

It was shortly after they had got settled in that they had an offer from the archæologist's old chief, Sir Flinders Petrie, to join him in Palestine, where he was working. They accepted the offer, and before they left suggested that I might like to join the expedition as artist, to illustrate the finds. They thought they could arrange with Sir Flinders for me to have my fare and keep, though I would not receive a salary.

I agreed to the suggestion, and they were to write to me when the arrangements had been made. The weather broke a day or two after they left, and the rain came down, as it can in Cyprus, as if out of a giant hose pipe. Apparently the same thing must have happened in Palestine for when a letter arrived, it was merely to say that conditions were impossible, the excavations

## THE *THRAKI*, HAIFA, TEL AVIV

flooded, that they were compelled to live in a leaky mud hut and intended returning to Cyprus the next week.

I was disappointed at missing this opportunity of visiting Palestine. However, the next spring, another occurred, this time of visiting the almost fabulous city of Petra. Situated in what is now Trans-Jordan, it lies some fifty miles north of the top of the Gulf of Akaba, and rather more than a hundred miles south of Jerusalem.

Formerly the journey from Jerusalem to Petra was only undertaken by the most intrepid of travellers. Not only were there no roads, so that the journey involved an arduous month to six weeks caravan travelling. But in Burkhardt's day, and indeed well into the present century, there was the danger of marauding Bedouins, who were liable ruthlessly to kill any infidel found in their country, regardless of whether he was armed with a safe conduct from the Turkish Government or no.

After the Great War, the Bedouin menace ceased; so much so in fact, that when the British government commenced to make a road from Ma'an to Elji, on the outskirts of Petra, the Arabs rose in revolt, declaring that the opening up of the country to motor traffic would deprive them of the living which they now gained through renting saddle horses or mules to European visitors!

The trouble was sufficiently serious for several people to lose their lives on each side. The revolt was crushed, but the Bedouins won their point, for the government promised that the road should go no further than Elji,

## EAST OF ATHENS

and that their animals would be hired under government supervision for the last two miles of the journey. So, by a lucky chance, the materialistic activities of the Arabs have saved Petra from the ultimate desecration. The temples, tombs and treasure houses will remain *for ever free from the smell of petrol fumes and the sound of klaxons*. At least I hope so.

We left Cyprus from Famagusta on the *Thraki*, for Beirut, and Haifa from which we were to go to Jerusalem. It was David's first experience of deck travelling, although his father had often travelled this way. The weather was perfect, and the sea glass smooth, and clear in the depths. The boat was packed, principally with young German Jews, emigrating to Palestine. They were a motley collection. Nearly all the girls, and many of the men were dressed in tight-fitting shorts and sleeveless shirts. Several of the other men wore linen suits with ultra wide trousers, and double-breasted jackets, cut off short at the waist. The trousers and jackets were lavishly decorated with large, nickel-plated buttons, which glittered dazzlingly in the sun.

On the whole they were a cheerful and optimistic lot, though sometimes their gaiety seemed forced, and on two occasions I found girls weeping bitterly in quiet corners. Having come the whole way from Athens, they were in full possession of the boat, when we came on board. We piled up our, mercifully, very limited baggage, and went to explore the First Class before we left dock.

Here there did not seem to be so many passengers, so we eagerly seized on three deck chairs, which we successfully held against all comers until nightfall.

## THE THRAKI, HAIFA, TEL AVIV

Then, alas, a steward of unamiable aspect, who had been eyeing us suspiciously for some hours took his opportunity. Making a great to do of clearing the deck and shutting up the chairs for the night, he grabbed ours, and bore them triumphantly away.

There was nothing for it but to roll up in a rug on a deck already cumbered to its utmost by the German Jews. We decided to put off sleeping as late as possible, and wandered up towards the bows. Someone with a pleasant light baritone voice was singing Brahms' *Minnelied*. He was at the last verse when we came on the group seated on the hatch.

*Traute, minnigliche Frau,  
Wollest nimmer fliehen,  
Das mein herz, gleich dieser au,  
Mög' in wonne blühen,  
Mög' in wonne blühen!*

There was loud applause when he finished. Then a girl sang. Her voice was amazing; bell clear, powerful and rounded. She too chose Brahms, this time the *Liebestrau*.

*O versenk', o versenk' dein leid, mein kind,  
In die see, in die tiefe see!  
Ein stein wohl bleibt auf des meeres grund,  
Mein leid kommt stets in die höh'!*

We listened in delight. At the last verse her voice soared passionately and triumphantly into the night.

*O mutter, und splittert der fels auch im wind,  
Meine treue die hält ihn aus;  
Die hält die hält ihn aus!*

## EAST OF ATHENS

As the notes died away, tears were streaming down her face. There was silence for a few minutes, but nobody else offered to sing.

We did not go on shore at Beirut, which has been variously described as the 'Queen of the Levant', the 'Paris of the Near East', and 'a horrid little French watering place, with a dash of the Orient'. Anyhow the white town, with Mount Lebanon rising in the background, made a pleasant enough picture as we approached across the dazzling blue water, and we did not court disillusionment by closer inspection.

We landed a number of French people here, but most of the other passengers, and of course all the Jews, were going on to Haifa. The Jews were becoming more and more emotional as the Promised Land approached. One was always coming across couples leaning arm in arm, over the rail, and gazing with rapt expressions into the distance, or else embracing ecstatically in quiet corners.

The weather continued perfect, so hot in fact that the majority of the European passengers had their faces and arms raw and peeling from too ardent sun bathing. There was always, however, a faint land breeze, which seemed to carry a scent of trees and flowers across the bows. "Hurray for the perfumes of Palestine," said David, sniffing loudly. "I declare I can smell them. The guide book doesn't lie after all."

The guide book in question, with which some kind person had presented him, started off with a nice burst of alliteration: 'Palestine the Perfumed, Cradle of Christianity'. At this time Mr. H. G. Wells had not

## THE *THRAKI*, HAIFA, TEL AVIV

publicly condemned the European habit of being interested in Palestine. Not having yet been informed, therefore 'that nothing began there', we accepted the two appellations on their face value. It was of the former in its more pleasant aspect that we were now aware. Awareness of its other less savoury forms, however, was to be ours almost from the time we landed.

I had heard tell of the perfumes of Arabia; I had sampled the perfumes of Egypt and Morocco. I expected, therefore, that the perfumes of Palestine would not be so very dissimilar. Nor was I mistaken. Principally composed of orange flower water, sandal wood and rancid oil, over a ground bass of human excrement, they arise to meet one, a tangible presence. Whatever variation there may be in the treble, the bass never changes.

As we drew near Haifa I began to wonder if I would be asked on arriving, what my religion was. Each time I had landed in Cyprus, the passport officer, having taken down everything he could find in my passport, had then demanded: "What religion?" And before I had had time to reply had added curtly: "C. of E., I suppose?"

It may be very silly, but I find the abbreviations C. of E., and R.C. peculiarly irritating. I want to throw things at people who say to me: "Oh, well then, if you were born in Dublin you must be an R.C." I am tempted to answer: "Yes, and I always go bare-foot to Mass, begorrah, and sleep on the floor with a pig on one side of me and two hens on the other!"

Anyhow the fourth time the passport officer said: "C. of E. I suppose?" I replied firmly: "No,

## EAST OF ATHENS

Buddhist " He looked slightly taken aback, scratched his head with his pen, and glanced at me sharply I kept my face utterly impassive, so, after a moment's hesitation, he duly recorded my conversation, which will doubtless remain for ever embalmed in the archives of the Cyprus government

Haifa looked anything but Biblical, as we landed at the bustling new port We had very little time to take our bearings, however, as David's father had some business to do in Tel Aviv, and we were to leave for Jerusalem the next morning As soon, therefore, as we had gone through the usual formalities of passports and Customs, we hurried to hire a car which would drive us to the new town

If Haifa had appeared bustling and modern, Tel Aviv was the modern (German) architect's dream Everywhere streamlined cars slid past streamlined houses, and crowds of youths and maidens (some of them not so streamlined), dashed about on bicycles, their abbreviated shorts riding up on their brown thighs

An Arab friend had warned me against wearing shorts if I went to Palestine Anyone who wears shorts in Palestine, he told me, is taken for a Jew "And then," he added, "you don't know what might happen to you " Not affecting shorts, I didn't need the warning, but now in Tel Aviv I saw that what he had said was true They seemed well on their way to being the universal costume for both sexes

The interest in the extraordinary growth it has made in a few years, was the only one we found in Tel Aviv Once the business that had brought us there was over, we circled round the Dizengoff Square, and drove up



## THE THRAKI, HAIFA, TEL AVIV

d down one or two of the main streets. Finally we me to rest at a Kosher restaurant, where we lunched f *Wiener Schnitzel* and honey cakes and cups of coffee vishly topped with whipped cream, an unheard of xury in Cyprus.

Replete, we collapsed back into the car, much more inclined to go to sleep than to do any further sight-seeing. I think we all slept during the drive into affa. I know I was almost asleep again before I got p to my room.

Our hotel was of the type described in England as Commercial and Temperance. It had a bleak appearance, and the rooms though scrupulously clean, contained the minimum of comfort, and, perhaps mercifully, absolutely no decorations. The proprietress, a stout, middle-aged Jewess of formidable aspect, sat in a sort of glass cage in the entrance, stroking her heavy moustache and interminably taking off and putting on her gold-rimmed pince-nez!

I seemed scarcely to have gone asleep, when I was awakened by tapping on the door. Cursing whoever it might be, I got up and went over and opened it. Outside was a thin, middle-aged woman with straggling, iron-grey hair hanging in wisps about her face. She was dressed in some sort of blouse and skirt, and flat-heeled brogues. "You've got to help me, you've got to help me!" she exclaimed breathlessly, almost before I had the door open. I looked at her sleepily, trying to take it all in. "You've got to help me," she repeated. I pulled myself together. "Certainly. What's the trouble?" I said. "What can I do to help?" "Come and sit on the lid of my trunk." I grinned. "Don't smirk,

## EAST OF ATHENS

young man," she snapped at me. "It's nothing to smirk about! I can't close my trunk, and I'm leaving the hotel. I won't stay a minute longer."

I controlled my face, and told her to lead me to the trunk. It was in the next room, and piled high with such a collection of miscellaneous garments that there didn't look a chance of the lid ever being persuaded to go down. I looked at it blankly.

"Well, sit on it," said she. "Don't just stand there looking at it." "Maybe if you were to take half the things out, or else pack it better, we might be able to shut it," I retorted, beginning to get rattled. She looked at me indignantly. "You're a commercial traveller!" I denied the accusation. "Oh, yes, you are. I always know a commercial traveller by his eye. Saucy fellows!" Suddenly she broke out into a high, shrill giggle, not unlike the whinny of a horse.

Then, before I had time to recover from my surprise, she drew herself up rigidly and shot me an icy look, as if to dare me to try and take advantage of her momentary lapse. Duly intimidated, I hastily sat down on the trunk, nearly breaking the hinge away at the back. But our combined efforts completely failed to close it, and eventually my suggestion had to be taken.

A pair of heavily-boned corsets, and several more obscure garments had to be removed before we finally forced the lid down.

"That all?" I inquired hopefully. "That's all, thank you, young man, thank you. Good-bye. Here's an apple for you!" And the next minute I found myself in the passage, clutching one apple (later discovered to be maggotty), as my reward for the day's good deed.

## THE *THRAKI*, HAIFA, TEL AVIV

The door slammed, and I heard the key turn in the lock behind me.

That evening I asked about my visitor. The proprietress took off her pince-nez. "Oh, hair," she said. "An English Frau. She is a leetle maad, I zink. She has been here three days. To-day she tell me she vill leaf. But before she go there come two men from the house, what you call it, asylum? She scream a lot, but she go vith them. *Ach, so.*" She put her pince-nez back on her nose, and continued to stroke her moustache thoughtfully.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### PALESTINE

THE next morning, we left Jaffa and its orange groves, en route for Jerusalem. Once we had left the sea and the busy ports behind us, we found that the average outlook still remained as ultra picturesquely Biblical, as the illustrations to the Family Bible of one's youth led one to expect.

Shepherds continue to watch their flocks, the Arabs on the lookout for a possible Jew with a gun, the Jews keeping a wary eye on the Arabs. The women of Samaria still come to the well for water. But nowadays more often bearing an empty petrol can, or bucket than an amphora. The mud houses remain, and the palms, flagrantly, untidily picturesque. And if motor lorries roar along the dusty roads, even they must slow up to make way for the leisurely, plodding strings of camels which cross their path.

The landscape has remained as one has imagined that it should look, and probably as that Family Bible pictured it, yes. But, as a matter of fact, it, along with all the other Mediterranean countries, has actually changed out of all recognition in the past two thousand years, owing to the destruction of the original forests and the introduction of new forms of plant life, particularly of the cactus.

Robert Graves recalls, in *Good bye to all that*, that he

## PALESTINE

once taunted George Moore with having, in *The Brook Kerith*, introduced cactus into the Holy Land some fifteen centuries before the discovery of America, its land of origin. One thinks with a sigh, how much pleasanter certain countries would be, if it had never left its native habitat.

It is that variety of the cactus known as the Prickly Pear or Indian Fig, which is mostly met with out of America. In fact, in a brief space of time, it has come to be regarded as one of the most typical growths of the countries of its adoption, especially those countries which edge the Mediterranean basin.

The Indian Fig (*opuntia ficus indicus*), is more devastating in its activities than a forest fire; more devastating, because more permanent in its destruction. After a forest fire, the earth will throw up fresh shoots. In time, if it is allowed that is, it will become a forest again.

In Mediterranean countries, true, it is rarely given the chance. The goatherd has no conscience where the feeding of his charges is concerned. Calmly, he watches them as they tear up the tender new shoots, with greedy lips, till only twigs remain. Then, when there is nothing more eatable left, he proceeds to set fire to the stubble, in order to encourage a further crop of green. To him his herd is all important.

I have seen goats, their forefeet planted against the trunks, tearing the locust beans from carob trees; even the olive is not sacred to them. I, myself, once owned a small olive grove, and speak with feeling.

They were mostly young trees, their lower branches just a goat's head from the ground, and even a barbed

## EAST OF ATHENS

wire fence proved little protection. The goatherds merely opened the gate, or if that was locked, cut the wire. On the whole, it was more economical to leave the gate unfastened.

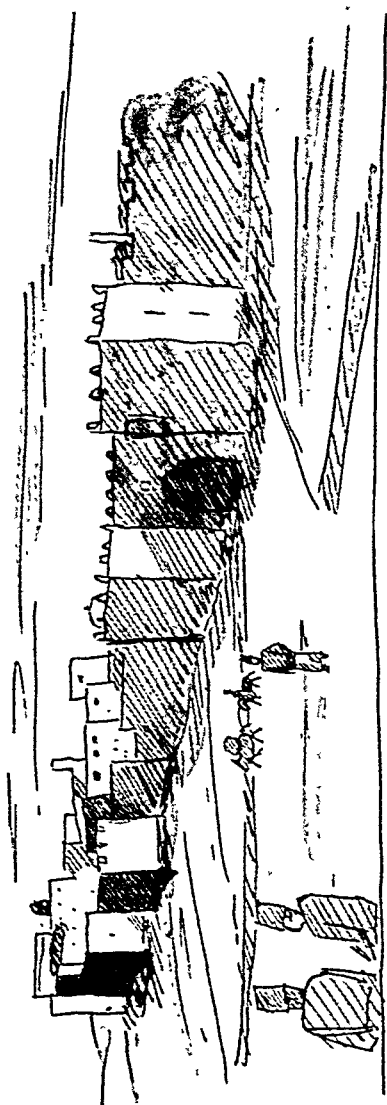
Granting then, as I first said, that the forest is given a chance to grow again, the fire will not have proved so destructive as the Prickly Pear would have been. Like the asphodel, and the bitter squill, once this has established itself, it brooks no intruders.

Hack off one of the fleshy, spear shaped leaves, eight times out of ten, it will fall edgeways on, sticking slightly into the earth. If the leaf is left where it has fallen, in a few days roots will begin to form. A few weeks more, and you will have a new cactus, putting out fresh leaves of its own, and so on, *in saecula saeculorum*.

In Australia, for example, the Prickly Pear grows at such a rate, that it covers several acres of land per day! Little can the womenfolk of the early settlers have imagined what a plague their little pots of ornamental cactus was going to bring to the new country.

In South Africa, too, the Prickly Pear has obviously come to stay. In parts of the Union the cactus walls grow ten and twelve feet high. On the road between Oudtshoorn and the Swarzberger Range, one passes through veritable avenues of monster cactus hedges. There, true, it is useful as cattle fodder in times of drought. With their spines burnt off, the fleshy leaves provide both nourishment and moisture.

But it is along the Mediterranean particularly, that the Indian Fig has become an integral part of the landscape, in fact, one of it's most characteristic features.



JERUSALEM—THE DAMASCUS GATE

## PALESTINE

I have only to shut my eyes, to visualize the cactus *sarebas* of the Mediterranean littoral. Southern Spain is a breeding ground. Across the straits, in Morocco, the International Zone is a maze of them. They fling a thorny barrier along the heights of Ceuta. In France, at the moment, there seem fewer than in most other Mediterranean lands. But the fact that the leaves are sold for planting in the flower markets of Marseille, Toulon, and Nice bodes ill for the future.

In Italy and Sicily they flourish, and above all, in Greece. In parts of Greece, in fact, there are positive jungles of Indian Fig. The peasants plant it broadcast as hedges, and for the sake of the juicy, rather tasteless fruit.

As hedges it is more than efficacious, as anyone who has ever come in contact with it knows. The needles shake off at the slightest knock, and will work themselves into the skin through the thickest clothing. Once they are in, only infinite patience, and a pair of fine tweezers are any help.

Juan Belmonte records in his autobiography, his sufferings from the cactus hedges of Spain. As a boy, he was in the habit of going out, along with other embryo matadors, to 'play' the bulls of the neighbouring farmers. Sometimes the boys chose moonlight nights, when they could find the bulls in their corrals, but other times they went by day, into the open pastures, pursuing them among the thickets of Prickly Pear.

Belmonte describes feelingly, how after a day spent 'playing' the bulls, he would have to spend the night lying naked on his bed, while his sister diligently picked out the spines, one by one.



## EAST OF ATHENS

But there is no need to be thrown against a cactus hedge, in order to suffer from it. In summer, when the fruit is ripe, the slightest breeze is sufficient to send it's delicate needles floating through the air. Then woe betide the passer-by!

Plate armour will hardly avail him, for the needles have the same powers of penetration as the plant itself. It is not difficult to visualize a time, when tracts of the Mediterranean coast may come to resemble the deserts of Arizona.

If the indiscriminate planting of cactus goes on unchecked, the idea is not so fantastic. So now the average traveller would fall into the same trap as George Moore, and with a considerable amount of justification.

The journey from Jaffa to Jerusalem is not long, but we did it in such a leisurely fashion, stopping here and there as the fancy took us, to admire the view, to eat, on any of a dozen excuses, (what a luxury it was to be able to stop a car when one wanted,) that it was already evening when we reached our destination.

My first impression of Jerusalem was one of anything but holy calm. The Greek Easter was only just over, and the whole town swarmed with a seething mob of still undispersed pilgrims.

It was essential that we leave for Petra before noon the next day, as David and his father had very little time at their disposal. However, I did not worry, as I fully expected to be able to spend at least three or four days there on my way back. Alas, as it afterwards turned out, this was not to be, for I was unable to wait even an hour in the Holy City on my return journey.

## PALESTINE

In consequence of this, I have no feeling of Jerusalem as a 'whole!' All that remains, is a chaotic impression of a hasty visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre . . . an impression of narrow streets, and smells, and straggling humanity.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre does, however, fairly well cover the ground trodden by the feet of Christ on his last earthly journey. The church was still packed with pilgrims, solemnly going the rounds, kissing every object that might, remotely, be considered holy. The air reeked with stale incense and candle grease.

The Sepulchre itself is an elaborate tomb. If I had pictured it at all, it was as it is shown in the painting by Piero della Francesca, with the triumphant Christ rising between the sleeping figures of the Roman soldiers. Perhaps just for this reason, perhaps for some other, (how should I know?) I failed to be overawed. Hardly, indeed, was I even impressed, but hurried out again into the sunshine.

When I got back to the hotel the car was already waiting, and after a hurried meal, we set out once more en route for Petra.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### PETRA

WE arrived at Ma'an about noon the next day. After driving across a level, chalky plain, whose white glare was painful to the eyes, it was pleasant to get among the palm groves and mud-walled gardens of the town, where a hot smell of fresh fig leaves mingled with the dust.

The town itself is hardly more than a large village, almost completely built of mud. It had, however, a busy, prosperous air, largely due, probably, to the air port, which must bring a considerable amount of business.

We only waited long enough to eat some food, and then drove on along the *piste* to Elji, where mules, which we had ordered over the telephone to the local police station, were to await us. Between the two villages there was a certain amount of cultivation on the narrow terraces watered by the *Wâdy Musa*.

Elji we found to be no more than a collection of hovels, used almost exclusively for storage, as the natives live in tents of goat hair, which they remove up into the coolness of the hills during the summer months.

Here we found our animals awaiting us. We had asked for riding mules, knowing the track to be rocky. But none, apparently, were available. They had for

## PETRA

us three horses, the most bony, sorry-looking beasts I had seen for many a long year. Half starved, and covered with sores, they did not look capable of carrying the lightest rider. The two pack mules were hardly any better; but the guide, an English-speaking young Arab from the British School at Ma'an, had quite a spirited grey stallion, with a very small head. Properly fed and groomed, he would have been worth watching.

As for the Arab policeman, who was to be our escort, he had a very superior beast, whose behaviour as our nags stumbled among the boulders and loose stones, often caused us to fall into the sins of anger and covetousness.

The mountain barrier surrounding Petra seems to be impenetrable, almost until one reaches the mouth of the cleft which pierces it. Slithering and stumbling, we descended in single file to the bed of the *Wādy Musa*. We followed the river until the red limestone hills towered above us. Suddenly, just as it was beginning to look as if we could go no further, a slit appeared in the face of the mountain. This slit, called *Es Sik* by the Arabs, winds its way for upwards of a mile, like an immense chasm, cut through the solid rock. Nowhere does it exceed some twenty yards in width, and in some places narrows to as little as six or seven.

As we rode into the cleft, under the broken remains of an arch, we seemed to pass into a land of pink twilight. The pink limestone walls soared up on either side and ahead of us. Only a faint blue band of sky showed, hundreds of feet above us, and at our feet,

## EAST OF ATHENS

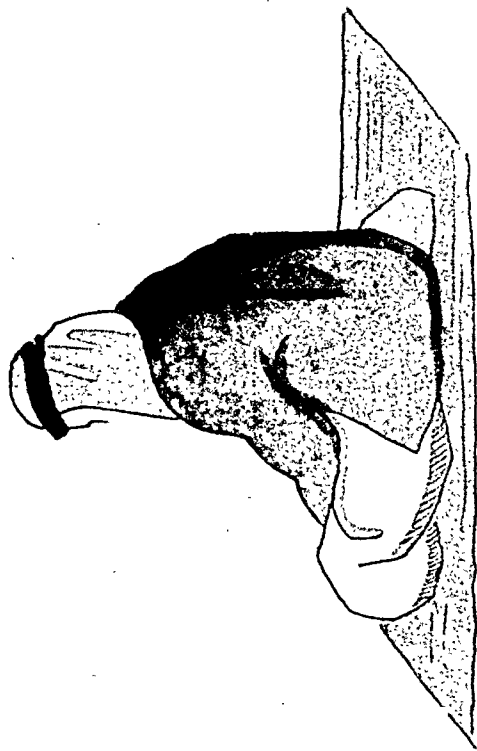
clumps of pink oleanders almost choked the bed of the ravine, sending out roots which caught at the feet of our horses.

Underfoot one occasionally saw traces of old paving blocks, and in the walls were many small shrines, where offerings were probably made to ensure a successful journey, or in thanks for a safe return, for this was formerly one of the great caravan centres of the Eastern world

We had been warned to expect a surprise where *Es Sık* ended. Usually this is a sure way of taking the edge off any excitement. But in this case, warning or no, our first glimpse of the temple of *El Khazna* was staggering. After about half an hour's slow ride, the ravine came to an abrupt end. We had all had our eyes fixed on the ground, which was still boulder strewn. It was getting towards sunset, and our animals were stumbling more than ever. In consequence of this, the whole façade of the temple was before us when we raised our heads.

A building some two hundred feet in height, chiselled in high relief from the solid face of a cliff—the idea is startling enough. Now in the sunset, the pillars and pediments of the temple glowed blood red, while under the porch the shadows were almost purple in their intensity. High above, and on either side, the cliffs soared up to the darkening sky.

It was getting too late to delay now, if we were to reach our camp for the night. Our escort urged us on, and we plunged into another ravine on the other side of the temple, which was to lead us out into the valley, which contains the ruins of the city. Thus, it



THE DUHR PRAYER

## PETRA

was not until our return journey that I was really able thoroughly to examine *El Khazna*. By daylight I found it frankly rather disappointing. Six columns, with Corinthian capitals, of which five are still standing, support a pediment, from which the figures have been hacked by the Arabs, in accordance with the Koranic instruction, which forbids the representation of any living being in painting or sculpture. Above, at each corner, are the angles of a further pediment, supported by two more columns. These angles end abruptly leaving space over the centre of the lower pediment for a semi-circular crowned with an urn, which the Bedouins have scarred with their bullets, in the hopes of securing the money it is supposed to contain.

The whole design is very four square and ungraceful, and the details are coarse. The work of Roman directed Arabs, it relies for effect on its incomparable situation, and its beauty of colouring, which ranges from almost white through all shades of pink, to ripe damson colour as night falls. On this, and on amazement at the labour that its construction must have entailed.

If not the most interesting *El Khazna* is the most spectacular of the thousand or so buildings, monuments and tombs which are scattered about the valley. Of these thousand the vast majority are Ishmaelite, or Nabatean;\* not more than a couple of dozen showing classical influence.

Beside one of these, a Roman building called the

\*The Nabatean civilization which had existed since about 700 B.C. was destroyed by Trajan in A.D. 105.

## EAST OF ATHENS

*Kasr el Bint*—the palace of the daughter, or young girl, was our camp, where we had the choice of sleeping in a tent or in one of the tombs carved out of the hillside. The night was chilly, so undeterred by superstitious fears, we chose the tomb.

Our supper was cooked over a fire of oleander wood, and branches of oleander, still laden with pink blossom formed our beds, where, rolled up in our blankets, we did not stir until the sun was well above the mountains.

While our guide was preparing coffee, we wandered across to take a look at the *Kasr el Bint*. The only remaining building in Petra entirely built of masonry, the roof has long since fallen and the four columns of the porch have been broken off short and lie where they fell. Otherwise the fabric is almost intact.

From here we were able to get some idea of the lay out of the ancient city. To east and west of us rose sheer mountain barriers, the one cut by *Es Sik*, through which we had entered the night before, the other by the *Wâdy es Siyah*. On the other two sides the valley stretched away to less precipitous hills. Here, on either side, the Nabateans had built a wall from mountain barrier to mountain barrier. Each wall was pierced by a gate, and these, along with *Es Sik*, formed the only entrances to the original city.

Behind us was *El Habiz*, the rocky hill, castle crowned, and riddled with caves and sepulchres, where we had spent the night. We could see our guide waving to us, so decided to put off further exploration until after breakfast, when we planned to retrace our steps towards *Es Sik*.



## PETRA

Running north of this is the mountain of *El Khoubda*. Having the largest and highest cliff surface in Petra, *El Khoubda* contains many of the most elaborate monuments. Passing through the remains of a triumphal arch, we followed the route of what was once the principal street of the city. Then turning, a little beyond the entrance to *Es Sik*, we came on the Urn Temple.

This temple is cut back into the face of the cliff, leaving a sort of courtyard in front, hemmed in on either side by the carved face of the rock. This courtyard, which is considerably above the level of the valley, was evidently extended over a series of barrel vaults, now in ruins, and was reached by a stairway, whose size may be imagined from the enormous blocks of stone which are now all that remains of it.

It was on one of the inside walls of the Urn Temple that we were pointed out an inscription in Greek, commemorating a Christian bishop of the fifth century, which makes one wonder if it were ever used as a Christian place of worship, but no record exists.

A few yards beyond this, we came to an ornate tomb, built rather in the same style as *El Khazna*, but so badly damaged by the weather and fallen rocks, that no details are distinguishable. Beside this tomb is the largest building in Petra, known as the palace, it is Roman in style and of three stories; the third story being of masonry, now fallen into ruins. The ground floor contains four large entrances, each flanked by two pillars supporting a pediment.

It was here, gazing up at the façade, that we came on the Americans. We had heard that two American

## EAST OF ATHENS

couples and a German professor were the only other visitors to Petra at this time, but they had all started out before we were up. They turned away from their guide, who was holding forth at great length, to pass the time of day with us. They had arrived the evening before, and had to leave that day, but were determined that everything must be seen before they left, come what might, so quickly turned their attention back to the guide.

We stood beside them for a few moments. They were all middle-aged, the wives, neat but unfashionable, wore pince-nez with little gold chains attached over one ear. I put them down as prosperous business people from the Middle West. The two women looked bored to tears. Presently one turned to the other. "Are you taking in a word of this?" she asked. "No, honey," said the other with a sigh. "But I can read up all about it when we get back to the States."

It is a matter of opinion who are the most amusing tourists to follow round. Some vote for the English, some for the Americans, and yet others for the Germans. Personally I find most of the Germans merely irritating, such as the shrill-voiced Valkyrie, *Baedeker* in hand, who pursued a friend and me round Pompeii, crying out plaintive inquiries to all and sundry in a mixture of German and English. "*Wo ist die Venus? Wo ist Merkur? Wo ist dies, wo ist das?*" I do not see ze pictures!

It was early summer. Pompeii was touristless, and her strident cries echoed down the deserted streets, bringing astonished and sleepy guardians out of their hiding places.

## PETRA

No, I always say Americans, in spite of my enjoyment of the two London girls' admiration of that appalling abomination the Vittorio Emmanuele Monument in Rome: "It don't 'arf look lovely with the sun shining on it!"

It was in Rome that I encountered what I consider my prize tourists, three Americans, a man and two women. I found them standing gazing with rapt attention at a Mary Magdalene. When I heard the man remark: "Say, she looks kinder worried about something!" I thought they might be worth following, and they were.

The climax came with a rather indifferent Rape of Europa, by Rubens. For several minutes the three faces were buried in their *Baedekers*; then raised to the picture, then lowered to the *Baedeker*, then raised again, for all the world like three hens drinking.

Then the man spoke. "The Rape of Europa," he announced. "No, perhaps that's not quite the right word; carrying off would be better." My heart missed a beat in delighted anticipation. "The Carrying off of Europa, by Peter Paul Rubens." He paused. "The book says that this here is a very important picture."

The younger of the women turned to him. "Say, wasn't she turned into a bull, or something?" she asked brightly. The man withered her with a glance. "No, no," he said sharply. "You're thinking of the winged horse Pegayus!"

But I am wandering too far from Petra. We left the tourists to their boredom, and went slowly on. The line of the ancient Nabatean wall ends just beyond the palace. Further around the hill is a Roman tomb,

## EAST OF ATHENS

which we did not visit. It is known to be that of an officer of the time of Antoninus Pius, one Sextus Florentinus.

It was already well past noon, and the heat was beginning to come in waves from the rocks. We retired into the shade of the cliffs to eat our bread and goat's milk cheese, and wait until the sun had lost some of its fierceness, before undertaking any more climbing.

We had planned to spend the afternoon visiting two monuments close to our camp, an unfinished tomb, and the *Columbarium*, so called from the fact that its walls are carved, for some unknown reason, into a series of pigeon holes, about a cubic foot in size. Also David and I wanted to climb to the castle at the top of our bedroom hill. This we did, later in the afternoon, though the *Columbarium* had to be left until the next day.

Narrow paths cut into the face of the rocks, led us upwards and over the *Wâdy es Siagh* to a small, flat open space. From there two cuts led up to the summit. It was a stiff climb, but well worth the exertion, for the whole of Petra lay stretched out at our feet, bathed in golden, late afternoon light.

We sat on top of the pile of broken masonry which is all that remains of the castle. It is supposed to have been built by Baldwin I, King of Jerusalem, who, with a keen business instinct, seized, as others had done before him, on the caravan routes leading to his capital. We tried to picture what the city might have looked like two thousand years ago, at the height of its pride and opulence. To picture the camel caravans with their loads of carpets and spices, ostrich feathers, pearls and

## PETRA

slaves; the Roman legions and the multi-coloured crowds. Almost, as the valley darkened, it was possible to resurrect the past.

But the sun sets with such rapidity in Petra, that David very practically pointed out that if we did not hurry, a goat path descent in pitch darkness would be our alternative to a night out on the mountain.

The next day was to be our last, and David's father was deploring the fact that at least nine hundred and fifty of the thousand or so monuments and tombs would have to be left unvisited. For myself, I had to confess that though I would gladly have spent another week in Petra, which I found fascinating, I could not work up keen regret for the tombs. Once I had visited the principal buildings, I was much more interested in the situation and layout of the city.

We had, however, at least two more important places to visit: the Roman amphitheatre, and the Great Place of Sacrifice. We visited the former first, getting up just before dawn in order to have as full a day as possible. We had passed the amphitheatre on the evening of our arrival as it lies on the west of the ravine leading from *El Khazna* into the city. But it had been too late for us to stop and examine it.

Slightly less than a semi-circle, the rows of seats, sufficient for several thousand people, are cut out of the living rock. At the back of the amphitheatre we could see gaping holes, which we were told were ancient tombs, whose façades the Romans had ruthlessly cut through in the course of their construction.

The Nabateans, the early inhabitants of Petra, were worshippers of the sun God Dusares, and his mother-

## EAST OF ATHENS

wife Alat Dusares was represented by an uncut black stone, and one finds many of these scattered about among the tombs and temples of the city. One famous black stone has even been taken over into Moslem worship, in the same manner as so many heathen symbols have been adopted and adapted by Christianity, I mean the black stone in the *kâaba* at Mecca, which is supposed to have been originally a symbol of Dusares.

The Great Place of Sacrifice, which is reputed to be the sanctuary where the principal image of Dusares was kept, lies high above the amphitheatre, on the mountain spur called *Zib Atouf*. We climbed up, partly over the rough ground, partly by stairways cut in the rock, until we reached two immense obelisks. These, we found to our amazement, had not been built on the mountain, but literally carved out of it. The whole top of the mountain was cut away and levelled, just leaving the two rocky fingers pointing up into the sky.

Just beyond them a steep flight of steps led up a small hill to the Great Place of Sacrifice. A large courtyard surrounded by stone benches is carved out of the top of the hill. At the western side of the courtyard are two stone altars. The smaller has four steps leading up to it. In the middle is cut a circular hollow, which supposedly held the image of Dusares. At the bottom a hole is cut in the side through which may have drained away the blood of sacrifices. To the west of this, facing the middle of the court, is another larger altar, with one step leading up to it. On the three sides touching on the courtyard it is surrounded by a deep, narrow moat. Exactly what rites were performed here

## PETRA

thousands of years ago nobody knows now, nor is there likelihood that conjecture will lead to any certainty.

In the afternoon David and I set out in an attempt to climb *Um el Biyara*, the highest of the mountains surrounding Petra, an impossible task in the time at our disposal, as it turned out. On its flat top the Nabateans had a stronghold, supposed to be absolutely impregnable. One can well believe it. From the valley the cliffs rise, completely unscaleable, and the only other means of approach is through a narrow corridor cut through the rock. As one nears the top, however, even this disappears and one is compelled to follow a track which would give goats some uneasy moments. We were glad enough to get back to the comparatively smooth surfaced corridor before the light began to fail.

The next morning we left early in order to have some time to spend at *El Khazna*. Another stumbling ride through *Es Sik* brought us once more to Elji, where our car was waiting for us. As we came out of the ravine, we seemed to be passing from the incredible to the credible; from a fantastic dream, back to the everyday, matter of fact present.

Only our guide and the police escort were left to remind us that for two days we had put aside the centuries. We said good-bye a little sadly, and disappeared in a cloud of dust into the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### CRETE

IT was February again, but how different from the year before. There was a King back in Athens now. Venèzilos was dead, and my letter of introduction would never be delivered. I thought of him as our ship approached his birthplace, where his body would soon be coming back for the last time.

I don't know what vision I had conjured up of Crete. Certainly it wasn't that provided by the modern Herakleion. As we anchored inside the pier of the big new harbour, I saw a small industrial town stretching flatly along the shore. In the distance, gaunt ranges of limestone hills showed dark against the sky. The walls and towers of the old Venetian harbour broke slightly the drabness of the waterfront, and towards these we rowed. Although it was still only early February, the weather was very hot. Boys were bathing from boats, and from the end of the pier.

A long dusty street, lined with the offices of shipping companies and trading firms, and a few shops, led up from the quay. We wandered on past the remains of the Venetian Town Hall, now poster covered, to the centre of the town. Here a little dusty garden surrounded a charming fountain, also Venetian. This, along with the harbour and Town Hall, were the only remains I could find in the town, of that occupation.



## CRETE

Of the Turkish rule, too, almost all traces have disappeared. One looks in vain for the minarets and gardens which lend such a charm to Rhodes and parts of Cyprus.

But my principal interest was not in Herakleion itself, but in Knossos, which lies a few miles inland. We hadn't very much time to spend. As soon, therefore, as we had got fixed up in an hotel, I set about making inquiries as to how to get there. I was told that there was a bus which passed within a quarter of a mile of the excavations. If I came down in the morning about ten o'clock, I could get a seat.

Next morning I was along in good time. I found that the bus was what must have been the Great Grandmother of all cars. It was literally tied together with wire and pieces of string. A four seater, it already contained four passengers and the driver. It was just about to start; but as nobody seemed to object to my being a sixth, neither did I. So the venerable machine was solemnly untied to let me in, and then tied up again after me.

I had driven in some peculiar cars in Cyprus, so was hardened to most things. At any rate there were no sheep tied to the running board, or even any hens underfoot, which was something. In Cyprus one often travels simply garlanded with livestock. I once added to the fun by bringing a duck and drake with me from Nicosia to Kyrenia. Ducks are rather scarce in Cyprus, and I had bought these two when I had the chance. I was on my way to the dentist that morning and took them along with me, loudly protesting. Their squawking made the dentist see me in front of all the

## EAST OF ATHENS

other patients, so there was something to be said for them.

They were a funny pair. We kept them in the garden for a long time, till we got tired of their noise; and they proved a very devoted couple. The drake would always politely let the duck eat all the food. Presently, however, like a dutiful spouse, she would bring up about half of it, which he ate. After a few minutes he would bring up half of that, which she re-ate, and so on until nothing remained. When we killed the duck, the drake pined so badly that we had to eat him a few days later.

I gave silent thanks, therefore, for this merciful lack of poultry, and squeezed in. Presently we were all fixed, and lurched off with a sickening grinding and squeaking. Blinding clouds of dust accompanied us, as we rattled through the town and out into the parched country-side. No rain had fallen since early autumn. A grey pall hung on the trees and bushes; and the fruit and vegetables in the market looked dry and withered.

With our complete lack of springs, the road felt as if it was strewn with boulders, but was probably merely rough. It ran through a narrow valley, edged with low hills, through which a hot, dry wind was sweeping clouds of dust.

After about twenty minutes it forked off to the right, and here, although there was no sign of habitation in sight, I was told to get out. This was an even more elaborate procedure than getting in, as we were more tightly packed, and no one could move until the various wires had been unwound.

## CRETE

Knossos, the driver assured me, pointing vaguely up the road, was only a few metres away. With that he and the passengers waved me good-bye, and with a deafening roar the ancient bus disappeared down the road. I was left to find my way as best I could to the Villa Ariadne, home of Mr. Hutchison, Sir Arthur Evans' assistant, and the guardian of Knossos.

I had been offered introductions to him, but with the experience of Mr. Strawe in mind had refused them. I thought that the mention of various mutual friends in Athens should be sufficient. Anyhow it wouldn't involve any formalities or obligations on his part. In this I was justified. When, having struggled up the valley in the teeth of the hot gale, I eventually arrived at the villa, I was most hospitably welcomed. Mr. Hutchison offered to take me over to Knossos, and insisted that afterwards I must come back and have lunch.

I was very grateful at having a guide to the excavations. Anyone, not an archæologist, must have found them most confusing to explore unguided.

The palace is built on a low hill in the middle of the narrow valley. A great deal of it has been restored. The original wall paintings, which were removed to the Herakleion Museum, have been replaced by reproductions. These seem too gaudily coloured until one sees the originals, in which a crude red is prominent. The main part of the palace is built round an oblong court some two hundred yards long by a hundred wide. The buildings, however, must have covered a vastly greater area. There are remains of courts, corridors, baths, guardrooms, temples and storerooms, with their great

## EAST OF ATHENS

amphoræ for oil and wine still intact The palace must, indeed, have been labyrinthine

One of the most remarkable things about Knossos is its complete lack of defences. Its civilization, the earliest known in Europe, and contemporary with the Babylonian and Egyptian, was evidently so supreme at sea that it had no need of protection on land Once its navy failed the end was inevitable, and fail it must have at last The remains of at least one great fire points to the fate that befell Minoan civilization when it lost its supremacy at sea

After about an hour and a half, Mr Hutchison left me in order to finish some work. He suggested that I might explore further up the valley, where there was a Venetian aqueduct, and return to the villa about one o'clock The gale was still blowing as fiercely as ever, but near the head of the valley, which the aqueduct spanned from hill to hill, one was slightly more sheltered

As it was still comparatively early, I climbed up to the top of the aqueduct, and was rewarded by magnificent views both inland, and back down the valley, over Knossos to Herakleion and the sea

Towards one o'clock I wandered back towards the villa which at first appeared completely deserted Presently, however, I discovered a pretty girl who spoke English, but with a definite foreign accent As she welcomed me and asked me in, I took her to be Mrs Hutchison However on the arrival of Mr Hutchison and his mother, she was placed as an Athenian girl, who was on a sketching holiday in Crete There was also staying at the villa a young archaeologist who was

ust off to Ithaka, which he suggested should be my next port of call. I said, perhaps. But it hasn't been visited yet, though I have several times passed close to it.

In the afternoon we all walked part of the way back to the town, collecting a car en route. I made my adieux, for we expected to return to Athens the next day. However when I got back to the hotel, I discovered that a shipping strike had started in Athens. Our boat, which was due the next day, wouldn't be coming. We were assured, though, that a boat of another company would be coming the day after; so that was some consolation.

Strikes seem almost a national hobby in Greece. I have hardly ever been in Athens that there hasn't been some sort of strike on; generally taxi or shipping. One good thing is that they don't, as a rule, last long. Anyhow, this gave us another day to look around Herakleion, my suggestion of going by bus to Canea being overruled.

The Museum, unfortunately, was under reconstruction. Most of the remains from Knossos were scattered at random about the floor. The murals, the famous cupbearer his face turned to the wall, were finally brought to view. The Snake Goddess was still in her glass case; and the crystal and ivory figurines. The necklaces also; as bright as if Ariadne had just removed them; and the clay mugs with bulging cheeks, reminiscent of Toby jugs. And everywhere the bulls, bull-fighters, bullvaulter. Bullfighting was evidently the sport of the Minos',\* which throws

\*I write Minos' because Mr. Hutchison told me that Minos is no longer regarded as a single king, but as the name of a line of kings comparable to the Pharaohs.

## EAST OF ATHENS

another obvious sidelight on the legend of the Minotaur

The only other place to visit was the Cathedral. This is not interesting on its own account, but for some fine old Byzantine eikons and other paintings. One speculates their possible formative influence on El Greco, who was born close by. Idle speculation, as he probably never saw them. I don't know where they were before the present church was built.

The next morning we went down again to the shipping company's office. Here we found that the boat which was due at ten, now wasn't expected until the afternoon. All afternoon we sat on the pier waiting, but no boat appeared. Crowds of peasants who had come down from the interior in ignorance of the strike, were camped out all over the quayside. They had even made little tents of rugs and cloths as some sort of protection. Their children and animals swarmed underfoot.

For three days this business of promises and false alarms continued. For three days we continued to haunt the pier, gazing hopefully out to sea for some sign of smoke, and each day to say what a pity it was we hadn't taken the bus to Canea the day before. At last, when we had really begun to give up hope, the long expected ship limped into port. She had been held up for twelve hours at Milos, with engine trouble. Even now she wasn't feeling too well.

We got thankfully on board and settled down. Hour after hour passed, and still there was no signs of leaving. All this time the wind was mounting, till the sea, which had been like glass, began to show angry white

## CRETE

crests. Even in the harbour our little ship started to roll badly. It was evening before we got under way, and by that time a gale was blowing.

The gaunt barren coast looked sullen in the gathering darkness. We pitched along, almost, it seemed, on the edge of the jagged rocks. The tops of the mountains were hidden by ragged streamers of grey cloud. We passed Retimo in the night. Morning found us tossing in the open roadstead off Canea, whose trees and minarets looked more like what I had expected of Herakleion. The gale continued to blow steadily. I already felt very seasick. Certainly nothing would have tempted me into a rowboat, to have my poor inside pitched hither and thither. So Canea remained unvisited.

In about twelve hours more we should have been at the Piræus. It was exactly twenty-four, however, before we finally reeled on to the dock. Twenty-four hours of tearing wind and lashing sea, when the boat seemed at times to spin like a top. Twenty-four hours that almost cured me of a desire to travel; at least for the next twenty-four hours!

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### MYKONOS

**R**OUND the steep shores of a little semi-circular bay, tiers of flat-roofed houses rose, dazzlingly white in the clear morning air, like clothes spread out to bleach on the hillside. Scattered among them were dozens of cupolas, pale pink, and blue, of the tiny chapels attached to the houses. Up above, the hills themselves were bare and tawny coloured. Only fig tree and palm, and an occasional creeper, flung over a garden wall, broke their monotony. A brisk wind was blowing, chasing woolly, sheep-like clouds over the island.

Mykonos was not considered important enough for the ship to make a long stay. We had scarcely been tumbled out into a rowboat, before she had swung about and was steaming away round the coast. Half the population of the town seemed to have turned out to greet our arrival. Men, women and children thronged the little pier as we landed. Our baggage was snatched up and whisked off at a great rate. Down the pier and along the quayside we saw it disappear, right over to the other side of the town. Here a little hotel stood on the edge of the water. We had no choice but to follow, though there was another hotel about half way round the quay. This evidently employed no touts, or not such efficient ones.



## MYKONOS

The hotel we were taken to was, we discovered later, sponsored and recommended by the various societies which sponsor and recommend such places. Incidentally it was the worst and dirtiest hotel we came across in Greece.

We had come to Mykonos with the intention of taking a house there if we liked the island sufficiently; and liking it, could find a suitable house. We decided almost immediately that we liked the island. Now the house difficulty had to be overcome. This, however, was to prove a bit of a problem.

Mykonos, which for ten months of the year sleeps peacefully, has a brief summer season, when the fashionable world of Athens throngs its beaches. On this account the natives are used to turning out of their houses in the summer, and letting them furnished. On every hand we were offered furnished houses; and what furniture! But only on a two or three months' lease would they rent them, which wasn't much good to us. At length we decided that the only thing to do was to make a tour of inspection of the whole place. Perhaps if we saw a house that we liked the look of, we might be able to persuade the owner to let it.

Half-way up the hill, a road circles behind the town. Mykonos looks its best from above, and not from the sea like so many of the island towns. From the hill the view is superb; one can see half the Cyclades; Tinos, and Syros, Delos, and far away Paros.

Delos is uninhabited except for goatherds and archæologists. Syros, however, has one of the largest towns in the islands. Hermopolis, the capital of the Cyclades, which we passed on our way to Mykonos,

## EAST OF ATHENS

risers on hills in the shape of a double pyramid, joined at the base

At the summit of each pyramid stands a big church, one Greek Orthodox and the other Roman Catholic. For Syros used to be a Venetian possession. The larger of the pyramids houses the Italian Catholic community who, though they no longer speak Italian, still have their own bishop, who lives perched up on top of the pyramid.

If the Venetians of Syros have lost their language, they haven't at any rate lost their love of colour. The limewash of their houses is tinted in shades of pink, blue, yellow and purple, which the strong sun has toned down, till the colours seem to blend in a haze which reflects the shifting lights of the Aegean itself. The wide waterfront was one of the busiest we had seen, and the bay was full of small craft of every description.

The island is of whitish limestone, and practically treeless, except in some sheltered valleys. But in the spring all the islands are thick with lovely wildflowers, which grow in their millions from the inhospitable soil. In the heat of the summer all these are dried up. All except the squills, which suddenly throw up tall spires of fragile looking silvery blossom from their enormous onion-like bulbs. These plants seed themselves wherever there is an inch of soil, and are a plague to the farmer. In fact, so prolific are they that they were regarded as a fertility symbol by the ancient Egyptians. The peasants make little attempt to destroy them, however. Perhaps because when they are in flower it is too hot to bother to hack them out of the hard

## MYKONOS

earth. In the spring when their broad green leaves are all over the country the peasants have other things to do. Anyhow, the squills remain!

But now was the season of the other flowers. On the edge of the road and the dry hillsides, grew clumps of wild delphiniums, their thick spires of vivid blue blossom rivalling the cultivated flowers in the gardens on either side. One of these gardens was particularly lovely. It lay below the level of the road, and a low wall edged the drop. The garden descended in terraces of fruit trees, and brilliant masses of flowers of every colour, intersected by paved paths. On the top terrace stood a small house, fronted by a wide pergola. The garden seemed empty.

We had just sat down on the edge of the low wall to admire it, when, suddenly, a voice spoke to us in English, and a woman in black appeared from behind a tree. We jumped up and apologized for staring, but she seemed pleased at the admiration her garden was getting. She asked us down to see it at closer range, and invited us to tea the next afternoon. She was, she told us, a widow who had lived most of her life in Egypt. She had now retired here to finish it cultivating her garden. We told her of our own search for a house. She promised to make inquiries for us and tell us the next afternoon, but she didn't hold out much hope.

We presently said *au revoir*, and went on our way. We had nearly come to the edge of the town, when we saw a long, orange-coloured house, in the midst of a large, overgrown garden. The position was magnificent, and the garden, though neglected, was charming. Surely it was too much to hope that it was as

## EAST OF ATHENS

empty as it looked. We made inquiries from some peasant women, who were drawing water down below, and found that the house was indeed empty.

It belonged, we were told, to the Athens Polytechnic, which has a finishing school for prize winning art students on Mylonos.

The school was a little further up the hill, so we decided to go and inquire immediately. The professor was in. We asked if the house was to let. He'd evidently never considered that question before, but said that probably the Polytechnic would be quite willing to rent it. He would have to write to Athens and make inquiries. In the meantime he would come down and show us over the house. We immediately fell in love with the garden. The house left plenty to be desired in the way of modern comforts and conveniences, but it was quite roomy, and the perfect view made up for a lot. We arranged to come up and discuss matters the next day with the professor's wife, who spoke French.

On our way back we again saw our earlier acquaintance, Madame Paraskiva. We told her of our find. She threw up her hands in horror. "But you can't take that house!" she exclaimed. "It's absolutely full of rats! Those people used to live in it themselves until a few months ago. They told me that they were driven out by the rats." This was a blow. However, we determined, all the same, to go and see the professor's wife the next morning. We could at least challenge her about it. So we duly presented ourselves at the school, which was on the other side of the road from 'our' house.

The professor let us in, and said that his wife would

be down in a moment. She was a sculptress, he added, as if this explained any delay. In a few minutes she appeared; stout, voluble, and very Teutonic. Following her came a servant with the inevitable coffee.

Coffee, in Greece, accompanies every transaction. Also, as we once learnt to our cost, it is the formal termination to a more lengthy visit. We had asked a Greek lady to tea, and expected her to stay about an hour; but on and on she sat. The conversation, never animated, for the whole afternoon she never volunteered an independent remark, became pierced by larger and larger gaps. At last, after four hours, she said good-bye and departed, leaving us almost prostrate. We told this to someone: "But she was waiting for her cup of coffee," they explained. "If you'd given her that it would have been the signal that she'd stayed long enough. She was probably as anxious to leave as you were for her to go!"

So now we sipped our coffee before getting down to business. Madame spoke fluent French interlarded with German and Greek. She addressed herself all the time to me, with sudden apologies to M. when she thought she was leaving her out of the conversation. We explained our wish to rent the house below. For how long? For perhaps a year, if the conditions were favourable. Madame felt sure that conditions could be arranged. It would be delightful for them to have English neighbours, etc., etc. But when I diffidently mentioned rats, she positively bristled: "*Je vous assure, Monsieur; pardon, Madame,*" a quick turn to M., "*que je n'ai jamais, jamais vu un seul rat dans cette maison.*" I explained what I had heard, but that,

## EAST OF ATHENS

of course, we were satisfied with her assurance "*Il y a, peut-être, Monsieur, pardon, Madame, des petits souris, mais des rats, jamais*" This seemed good enough, surely We concluded that Madame Paraskiva must have taken them up wrongly We said that we would wait until they wrote to Athens for details of rent and conditions In the meantime we could still be looking round in case we found something we liked better That afternoon we had promised to have tea with Madame Paraskiva and listen in to the English News on her radio

When we got there, we found an elaborate tea prepared for us This we were expected to eat alone, while Madame Paraskiva and a cousin of hers sat and watched us I must say I always find the custom by which the guest eats, while the family look on, most embarrassing I have never been able to get used to it We told Madame Paraskiva what the professor's wife had said about the rats She shrugged her shoulders, and said that, of course, she had possibly been mistaken In any case, she added, her cousin would show us three or four other houses which were to let While we were waiting we might as well see them Perhaps we'd find something nicer

So we spent the next few days in visiting the other houses, none of which were at all possible, and in taking long walks across the island The bare, rocky country was reminiscent of parts of the west of Ireland, except that now, in February, Mykonos had Ireland's summer colouring

There was only one unusual event during this time That was an invitation from Madame Paraskiva to

## MYKONOS

come up one morning and have a bath at her house! Here she had installed the only bath on the island. This was certainly the height of hospitality. After a bathless week in the recommended hotel it was as deeply appreciated, as it was unexpected. She also rescued us from the tedium of the hotel cooking, by telling us of a tiny restaurant, run by the former *chef* on the Royal Yacht.

Here in a tiny room, stacked with great barrels of wine, were rows of tables, and a tiled range where charcoal fires were burning. All the cooking was done on this. One could sit and watch one's red mullet grilling, and then eat it with a salad of lettuce and fresh liquorice, followed by big bowls of *giaourti*.

To think that I once looked with suspicion on *giaourti*, of which a bastard version now masquerades in western Europe, under the name of yoghurt! The true and delectable reality is made from artificially soured sheep's milk. It is thick and rich, with a slight, refreshing tang under its creaminess. Its inventor, whoever he was should have a memorial. Not, however, in the form of a Public Monument. Perhaps a Home of Rest for Prize Ewes would be appropriate.

I still regret the months when I might have eaten my fill of *giaourti*, but was content, instead, to watch other people eating it, and say: "How can you?" The British prejudice against sheep's milk proving too strong. Why it should have, I can't imagine, for I never had any against goat's milk. In fact, I am always irritated by the people who exclaim: "Oh, I couldn't drink *goat's* milk, it smells!" Especially when

## EAST OF ATHENS

they've just had goat's milk in their tea without noticing it.

The Greek islands are full of people who have never been as far as Athens in their lives. In many cases, they have not even been so far as the next island, which may be only half an hour's journey. Of the peasants, of course, it is understandable; though often it is they who do the most travelling. But that educated people are content to sit and vegetate, not moving more than, perhaps, a mile from their own houses, in years, is incomprehensible to me. The difference between Madame Paraskiva and her relations was a case in point. She had travelled, lived for years in Egypt, and seen the world. They had moved seldom, if ever, from Mykonos. It wasn't that they were uneducated by comparison, but just dull. One would never have thought them to be of one family.

Of course, often these island dwellers develop amusing eccentricities, which reminds me of the Three Graces.

These Goddesses, who are sisters, live on one of the Greek islands. Their combined ages must total well over two hundred years. But in manner, and one presumes, in heart, they are still young; terribly young. There is another sister, but she is too frail ever to appear. So the 'girls' carry on the social round. Shakily they tread a measure at the local dances, in high-heeled satin shoes, wrinkled cotton stockings, and knee length silk dresses of incredible antiquity, which rend noisily under the rough hands of obstreperous or malicious partners.

They recently attended a Fancy Dress Ball. One



## MYKONOS

appeared in bathing costume, as a Beauty Prize Winner; the second as Columbine; and the third as a Butterfly. The Butterfly was induced to fly out of the window by the local wits. She landed muddily in a flower bed, poor old girl.

The Graces came to pay us a state visit one day. They sat in a row drinking tea and eating cakes; still wearing their white cotton gloves. They gazed with interest, nicely blended with disapproval, at my paintings.

"But why is she naked?" asked one in a tremulous voice. "I've never seen paintings like this before," said the second. The third one was silent; she had once spent a few days in Athens, and was the travelled member of the family. The others had never left the island, though from their windows they can see the ships coming and going. M. asked one of them did she never feel a longing to get on a boat and sail away. "But why should I, my dear?" was the reply. "I'm quite happy here." There was nothing to be said. And yet these are educated, well-read women, who speak English, French, and Italian, besides their native Greek. Perhaps such contentment is a blessing; I often wonder.

At last the hoped for letter arrived from Athens. The professor sent down a note to our hotel to ask us to come up to the school. Madame was waiting with the letter, and we sat down to hear the terms. Rent, that was fairly reasonable. But then came the snags: First, we could only have the house monthly; and the first month we must put it all into good repair at our own expense. Then we must agree to prune all the

## EAST OF ATHENS

fruit trees and keep them watered, a reasonable enough condition, if we were to have the fruit, which we were not. The well belonging to the house was to be at the disposal of the school. We must always leave the door open for their servants to come in whenever they wanted—not so good. Lastly, we must have no visitors to stay with us or we would have to go.

Our enthusiasm dwindled under this list of drawbacks. We told Madame that much as we liked the house, the conditions were quite impossible. We certainly couldn't take it. Madame pronounced herself devastated, but agreed that the terms did seem a bit unreasonable.

"But then," she added consolingly, "you probably wouldn't have liked it anyhow. The garden is absolutely full of snakes. *Plein, plein. On ne peut guere se promener la bas.* They come into the house, too, at night, if one leaves the windows open (didn't I know that from Cyprus!) And then, too, there are the scorpions which hide in the old woodwork. We ourselves had to leave on account of them. *Mais, des rats, jamais!*"

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### SAMOS

AFTER this set back, there didn't seem much point in staying on in Mykonos. Already, the whole island knew that we were looking for a house. Every possible and impossible dwelling had long since been brought to our notice. The only one which appealed to us at all was right down beside the water. Here there was a little square, with houses on three sides; and open on the fourth to the sea. The house was quite large and had a patio and a tiny chapel. To this chapel the landlord and his family wanted admission three times a year, for purposes, as I understood, of ancestor worship!

We decided, however, before doing anything about it, to visit the nearby islands of Samos and Andros. Both of these, according to Madame Paraskiva, were charming. Also they were places, she said, where we would be more likely to find what we were looking for.

The boat for Samos left early in the morning. In fact it was the same boat which had dropped us at Mykonos a week or so before. It went on to Ickaria, and finally to Vathy, arriving there during the afternoon. We were advised only to take 'deck' tickets; in any case we always did so, unless travelling on a mid-winters night, as the voyage to Samos was considered by way of being a pleasure trip. Well, in mid-summer it

## EAST OF ATHENS

may have been, but this was early March. In spite of the hot sun and cloudless blue sky, a sharp wind was blowing. Our ship, an ex river steamer, long and narrow, rolled like mad.

The open sea after we rounded Mykonos, and before we reached the comparative shelter of the coast of Ickaria, laid us both low. I went up into the bows, leaving M. huddled up in a corner out of the wind. We were almost the only passengers, certainly the only foreigners on the boat. As such we were objects of great interest to the incredibly filthy small boy who helped in the galley, and brought coffee to the deck passengers.

M. told me afterwards that when I was away he came and danced up and down in front of her banging loudly on his tray, and shouting "Very good, very nice! Very good, very nice!" every time she was seasick. She said she felt too ill to do anything but wish heartily, that she could be sick over him.

As we coasted along Ickaria we roused up a little. This must be one of the loneliest of the larger islands. It rises up steeply from the sea, the hillsides thickly covered with woodland. Heavy clouds hung on the tops of the hills, and trailed down among the trees. About half way along the coast we anchored for a few minutes, where a tiny jetty and four or five houses edged a small bay. A track wound up the hillside. We could see some laden donkeys disappearing among the trees. A boat rowed out from the jetty. One man came on board, and we landed two peasant women, and the mails.

The place, to me, had a peculiar air of sadness and

## SAMOS.

desolation. This may, of course, have been the effect of seasickness! I was glad, though, when we steamed away again, past mile after mile more of steep, tree-covered coast, and trailing, tattered cloud. Another spell of open sea followed, and it was with true thankfulness that we at last glimpsed the mountains of Samos. We were going on to Vathy, which lies at the other end of the island. There was a stop first at the near side, however, which gave us a lull, and breathing space. Several men came on board here with trays of *giaourti*. This was quickly bought by the seasick passengers, ourselves included.

It was a couple of hours more before we reached Vathy, coasting gently along the mountainous shore. We seemed to be running straight into the mountains. Eventually we found ourselves in a narrow bay, surrounded by steep hills on three sides. The town rose on the left and directly ahead. On the left it was quite Italianate in appearance, with roomy-looking, red-roofed houses, terraced among gardens, where cypress trees predominated. Along the edge of the sea, almost from the beginning of the bay, ran a stone quay.

At the far end the hills fell back a few yards. Here a huddled, whitewashed town swarmed up, pierced by incredibly steep, ladder-like streets. On the right of the bay were pine woods, and a few scattered houses. We anchored off the quay, opposite the level ground, which lay between the Italianate section of the town and the other. Here there was an open place surrounded by shops and *cafés*, and a few public buildings.

Compton Mackenzie, whose *Gallipoli Memories* I borrowed from the consul here, describes Vathy as a

## EAST OF ATHENS

'snug little port'. I suppose from a yachtsman's point of view, it is. Now that we were anchored up at the far end of the harbour, we seemed to be in a lake. Behind us the silhouette of the Asia Minor mountains filled the narrow entrance.

Samos, the consul told me, used to be an independent state ruled by its native princes. (One may still buy a picture post card of the last of these princes, at the stationers' shops in Vathy.) Eventually the people begged to be joined to Greece. "But now," he added, "most of them heartily regret their parents' eagerness." Similarly, I know, many Corfuotes regret that England ever gave up the Seven Islands. I wondered how long it would take Cyprus and the Dodecanese to grow discontented if they achieved their ambition of union with Greece!

We did not stay long in Vathy. For one thing it rained persistently. Heavy black clouds hung over the hills even when the rain was not actually falling. Also the town presented few attractions as a place of residence, even had we been able to find a suitable house. From the tourist point of view, too, it had little of interest. The old part on the hill was picturesque, but not particularly so. The Museum was full of broken pottery, and hardly merited five minutes visit. While what might have been agreeable walks, through the pinewoods of the opposite shore, were always spoilt for us by the torrential rain. So after a brief visit, we gave it up as a bad job, and decided to go and see what Andros was like.

To get to Andros, however, we had to go first to Tinos, the next call after Mykonos. There we must wait

## SAMOS

all night, and get a boat on the next morning. When we left Samos it was still raining hard, but we managed to embark between the showers. It is in this kind of weather that the Greek landing system is really infuriating. How really infuriating one only thoroughly realizes when sitting in a sopping wet boat with the water trickling down one's neck. But at least the persistent rain had had the effect of calming the sea somewhat. The return journey wasn't nearly as bad as coming. For one thing the ship was slightly broader, and mercifully we were spared: 'Very good, very nice.' Perhaps mercifully for him also, for he would assuredly have been thrown overboard.

It was a much fuller ship than the other. There was, of course, the usual complement of peasants with their livestock and children; and of sailors and soldiers returning from leave. Besides, there was a group of English and Americans, also travelling deck, with whom we got into conversation. One of the Americans was a member of the Near East Relief Mission, which has an Orphanage on Syros.

This mission, he told us, was organized during the World War to help Syrian and Armenian Christians. These were, as usual, being persecuted for their faith by the Turks, who deported whole villages, making the inhabitants march across the mountainous interior of Asia Minor towards Arabia. Regardless of the snow and bitter cold, or of the scorching heat, they were forced on, so that thousands died by the way. After the Armistice, conditions became even worse. In 1922 the deportations of Greeks and Armenians brought a million and a half refugees into Greece. At the end of

## EAST OF ATHENS

that year, the N E R brought some seventeen thousand children to Athens. As no suitable accommodation could be found for them it was eventually decided to build on Syros.

"The children," he went on, "stay at the Orphanage until they are sixteen. Up till that age, besides the ordinary school work, the boys are taught trades, and the girls, domestic economy. All the housework, mending, laundry work, etc., is done by the pupils. They have even organized clubs, choirs, and a small orchestra, besides the ordinary games. They are now being turned out into the world well fitted for the struggle ahead of them." The American was tremendously enthusiastic about his work. His keenness was infectious, and we promised to visit the Orphanage at the first opportunity.

This time the boat stopped at a small port on the east end of Ickaria. This looked slightly livelier than our previous stop, but only slightly. Then we passed along the opposite, or southern side of the island. It was sunset by the time we reached Mykonos. When we anchored in Tinos harbour, it was quite dark. Again the inevitable scramble to land. The boatmen clung precariously to the ropes along the sides of the ship, as their rowboats were tossed violently about in the wash. Whatever else may be said of the Greek boatmen, at least they are good sailors, plucky and agile.

We got away in one of the first boats. We were just congratulating ourselves, when suddenly we were hailed by a huge fat woman, who was agitatedly wobbling about on the end of the gangway. She was evidently a friend of the boatmen. In spite of our protests, they turned and rowed back to the ship. All



## SAMOS

smiles, now, the fat woman collapsed into the boat like a sack of coals, sending up a drenching shower of spray all over us.

Once on the quay, we were besieged by touts from the various hotels. In desperation, we allowed ourselves to be carried off by a tall, humorous-looking middle-aged man. Like so many of the islanders, he had a few words of Americanese. Everywhere you go in Greece, you meet men who have worked in the States. Then, having made a little money they have come back to Greece to settle down. Generally, they buy a piece of land and build themselves a house. Sometimes, of course, they just marry a girl who brings a house as her dowry. I have talked to many Greeks working in the United States. In almost every case, they are just working hard and saving money against the day when they can go home. They seem to have no affection for America, even if they've been years there. They simply regard it as a place in which to make dollars quickly. This, one feels, must be rather galling for the Americans; for if the Greeks bring nothing into the States, they assuredly take out as much as they can.

This man had come back to Tinos some years previously, and had bought himself a little hotel at the other end of the harbour. It was fairly primitive, as are most of the island hotels, but clean and adequately comfortable. A wrinkled old crone cooked us coffee and boiled eggs. Having eaten, we tumbled thankfully into bed, as we had to be up at dawn to catch the Andros boat. We impressed on our landlord the need for calling us in good time. This he promised to do, saying that he was down at the dock himself to meet

## EAST OF ATHENS

every ship A most un-Greek energy, we thought, sceptically But we needn't have been sceptical It was pitch dark when there was a knocking on the door, loud enough to wake everyone in the hotel A voice thundered out in English "Boooooat coming Booooooat coming" We struggled sleepily out of bed, and opened the door to show that we really were up But all the same, at intervals of about two minutes the voice would boom "Boooooat coming," until we finally appeared, dressed and packed

Dawn was just whitening the sea, when we got out onto the road It disclosed the dim cluster of the town, which we had not been able to see the night before, climbing the hill to the church of Our Lady of Tinos Even when we reached the landing stage there was still no sign of our ship It was a full half hour before she even appeared in sight We used the interval to snatch a cup of Turkish coffee and a glass of water, inadequate beginning to a day We had to walk up and down briskly in order to keep warm It was still early enough to be very chilly Although the sky was clear, the wind, which continually drives its flocks of clouds across the Aegean, was blowing harder than usual

We could see the ridiculous little ship pitching violently, as she neared the harbour The Greek inter-island steamers are, many of them, old English boats Like worn out horses, they have been shipped abroad, to end their days in an inferior servitude This one didn't look more than three hundred tons It had very limited deck space, and we had difficulty in finding a sheltered corner, as she struggled once more out of the harbour

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### ANDROS

THE narrow channel between Tinos and Andros has a bad reputation, and on this occasion it lived up to it. The boat seemed to stand on end. She hardly rolled at all, but first the bow and then the stern rose up perpendicularly. Back and forth one slithered, helplessly clinging to the rail. I felt that I ought to be seasick. Under ordinary circumstances, and certainly had I been in a cabin, I would have been. As it was, I was too fascinated watching the behaviour of the boat; too busy, also, trying to keep my balance. To say that I completely forgot, would be to exaggerate. However, my reaction says something for those who talk of the psychology of nausea.

Andros presented a barren, inhospitable coast, with cliffs and jagged rocks, where the green waves lashed themselves to white. The cliffs seemed interminable. There was no sign of a break, no sign of habitation or life of any sort; not even a herd of goats among the aromatic scrub which covered their summits.

Then, suddenly, we turned into a little bay, with the first strip of level ground we had yet seen. On our left, a high jagged spur of land ran out into the water. On its rocky point were the ruins of a tower, and on the high ground above, a little red town nestled. In the background a woody valley ran up between the hills.

## EAST OF ATHENS

On the right, the bay curved round, with four or five white houses on the shore, to a long stone quay. Even putting aside our thankfulness at sighting harbour, the scene was charming.

But any vague hope that we might be going to dock was soon dispelled. As we turned in towards the quay we saw a swarm of little boats, which were bobbing wildly up and down in the swell. We hove to, only a few feet from the shore. The boatmen made desperate efforts to catch hold of rope or rail, as they were swept past the foot of our ladder. At last a couple of them succeeded, and we began to disembark. This was quite a tricky business, and required nice calculation. We were still pitching badly, while the rowboats bounced like mad, slapping the water, and sending up clouds of spray. One had to wait for the exact moment, when the rowboat rose on the wave, and the ship sank to meet it, in order to jump. A moment's hesitation was fatal, meaning a ducking, or a possible broken leg, if one landed in the boat.

We both made the jump safely. However, M. swore it was the last boat she would ever go on. I didn't pay much attention to this threat. I'd heard it too often, during her seasick moments. Anyhow, I guessed that she wouldn't want to spend the rest of her life on Andros, however charming we might find it.

We landed shakily on the quay and looked around for some means of transport. The town was about a mile away, on the other side of the bay. We were too late, though. Another boat had landed just before ours. The only carriage was already loaded with passengers and baggage, and was jingling away down

the road. The rest of the passengers had picked up their bundles and suitcases, and were plodding off in its wake. There seemed nothing for it but to do likewise.

A rough road wound round at the back of the pebbly beach, following the curve of the bay. After a while another road led off to the right, up the valley. There, scattered patches of pale pink and white among the green showed where the fruit trees were just beginning to blossom. But here disillusionment began. The town, which had looked so charming from the sea started to reveal itself in its true colours.

We had heard that Andros was a town of wealthy ship owners, who had built themselves houses there. Now we began to see for ourselves, the architectural fruit of their plutocratic dreams. Houses there were, which almost surpassed the monstrosities of the Riviera villa-builders. But unlike these, they had hardly a garden to hide their shameful nakedness. As we climbed the steep steps to the town, from all sides these horrors leered at us. It was with a relief, mental as well as physical, that we reached the drab ordinariness of the shop-lined main street.

We soon found an hotel. But again we were forestalled, this time by a bunch of commercial travellers. These had just taken all the small rooms, leaving only a kind of dormitory, with six beds. The maid who was in charge didn't know what to do. She went away to call the landlady, who presently appeared in elaborate *negligée*. With the aid of this, she exercised her fascinations on the commercials to such good purpose, that they agreed to share the dormitory. This left a room with two beds free for us.

## EAST OF ATHENS

We so much disliked the atmosphere of Andros, that the first thing we did after having something to eat in the restaurant next door, was to make inquiries about the boat back to Tinos. To our horror, we were told that it would be six days before another was due to leave. The boat we had arrived on was just steaming out of the bay, or I believe we would have gone back on that. Now we had the prospect of six days of that horrid town. There was nothing to do except take country walks, or wander up and down the main street. The townspeople stood in groups, nudging and staring as we passed, but with a rudeness which we had never before encountered among the Greek islanders. We heard afterwards in Athens, that the people of Andros are disliked throughout Greece. They have a reputation for boorishness and bad manners, and the girls from there are said to make the worst servants.

I decided to make some more inquiries, before we gave up all hope of getting away. I went back again to the shipping office. There on being pressed further, the clerk admitted that there was a boat of sorts. But not such a boat as he could conscientiously recommend, he added. It was leaving the next day. Why hadn't he told us about it before? Well, it wasn't a very good boat. Heaven help us, if the shipping clerk admitted it wasn't good. But the case was desperate. Anyhow, the clerk went on, it didn't leave from here, but from the other side of the island. We would have to go across by bus the next afternoon to a place called Batsi. The boat was calling there about five o'clock. That suited us splendidly. It gave us a chance of

## ANDROS

seeing the island, and avoided that dreadful six days' wait here. So, cheered up, we set out to explore the country-side.

This had, automatically, taken on a more amiable aspect, now that we knew we wouldn't have to endure six days of it. The day was bright and warm, though nothing like as hot as Crete had been the month before, but there was a cool breeze blowing from the sea. We retraced our steps along the coast road, with the intention of turning off up the valley. Here, another track wound off to the right, up the face of the hill. We started to climb steadily. On either side of the road, the hillsides were thick with wildflowers; most conspicuous among them, the vivid blue delphiniums which we had noticed at Mykonos. The air was heavy with the scent of rosemary and wild mint, which grew in heavy clumps. We met some peasant women. They passed us by scowling, and without the customary Καλή 'Μέρα σας or Χαίρετε we had grown so used to everywhere else.

As the road wound higher, we had magnificent views over the valley, and far out to sea. Also glimpses of another range of hills which seemed to extend beyond and above the one we were climbing. One more turning, and we were overhanging another deep valley, with these hills as its opposite flank. In the depth of the valley, a little stream ran through meadows of fruit trees and poplars. Away to the right, it reached a sheltered crescent of sandy beach, where it spread out, and lost itself in the sea.

Half-way up the steep hillside opposite, clung a little village of pale blue houses; almost the same shade of

## EAST OF ATHENS

pale sky blue as the houses of Kalymnos. Other houses were scattered all over the slope, even up to the steep summit, among the thick groves of olive trees and cypresses. The road turned again, and ran sharply down into the valley. We walked a few yards, hesitated, and then turned back. We would leave one charming picture of Andros unspoiled by closer contact.

By the time we got back to the hotel, it was almost dusk. The landlady was still, or perhaps again in her *negligée*. She came into our room to invite us to a *Soirée Musicale* at the local Club. She knew, she said, that I would be interested, as there was, or had been, it was never very clear, a member who had painted that celebrated picture, *Le Songe de Jacob*. Of course, yes, I'd put 'painter' on the form I'd just filled in for the police.

I groaned inwardly. What dreadful recollections the words *Soirée Musicale* called back. The last one we had graced had been in Cyprus. A Violin Recital by the Famous Violinist, Herr Somebody or Other from Vienna, the advertisements had said. Famous, possibly, he may have been, in some fourth rate *café*. On a raucous fiddle, and to the accompaniment of an out of tune hotel piano, he had produced laborious versions of such novelties as Dvorak's *Humoresque*, and Elgar's *Salut d'Amour*.

I caught M.'s eye and gave her a stony stare. She took the hint nobly, gave a prodigious yawn, and said how *enchanted* she would have been to have gone, had it not been that she was absolutely *exhausted* by her journey. She would be afraid of falling asleep, and disgracing herself. As the same excuse served for me,



## ANDROS

we never had a chance of learning anything further of *Le-Songe de Jacob*. It, and its creator, will always remain a titillating mystery in my life; unless, perchance, I ever return to Andros.

Another mystery which we never solved was whether the landlady ever wore anything but the *negligée*. Did she go to the *Soirée* in it? For she was still wearing it when we left the next afternoon!

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### BATSI

WE seemed fated to have difficulty in leaving Andros. The next day, we very nearly didn't get to Batsi for our boat after all. The bus, or rather the dilapidated six seater, which was to take us, was due to leave after lunch, from the little square at the top of the main street. We arrived in good time, and wedged ourselves in among the other five passengers. This left about ten inches for the driver, who was not yet visible. The usual knot of idlers had gathered when he arrived, half carrying a most disreputable looking old man. The old man was so drunk, that on being released he rolled over, and lay in the gutter. And there he stayed until hoisted to his feet again.

By this time quite a crowd had gathered, hoping for some excitement. The driver tinkered about vaguely inside the bonnet of the car. Periodically, he would stop to hoist the drunk out of the gutter, where he was happily rolling, and prop him against the wall. At last, in desperation, he slammed down the bonnet, and asked us all to get out. The other five passengers, he then packed into a four-seater which stood in front of us. Ourselves, he ushered into an even more shabby looking six-seater, standing behind.

Just as we'd got ourselves settled once more, he came back dragging the drunk. He opened the door

and shoved him in along side of us. I promptly opened the opposite door, and he fell out again on the other side. This really wasn't good enough. I tackled the driver, and said very firmly that we were *not* going to travel with the inebriated gentleman. The driver waved his arms about, and expressed surprise and concern at our decision. He said, however, that if we really preferred it, we might get back into the original car. This didn't seem very hopeful, under the circumstances. But really, perhaps, it was no more so than being in either of the other cars. In the one in front, our five fellow passengers still sat placidly. In the other, the drunk had again been laid, with his feet hanging out of the door, to sleep it off.

So back we changed again. Then the driver commenced once more to tinker with the engine, until he did, at last, produce feeble signs of life. At that, he himself, was galvanized into feverish activity. He chivvied the other passengers out of their car, and into ours, and then disappeared down the street. The sleeper seemed completely forgotten.

Most of the original onlookers had by now drifted away. But constantly new ones strolled up to stare and comment. Now two of these entered into conversation with us, as obvious strangers. They had the usual list of personal questions, then: Where were we going? To Batsi. Why? To catch the boat to Tinos, which called there this afternoon. Oh, but we were mistaken. The boat for Tinos left from here this afternoon, not from Batsi. Quickly, we must get out, or we'd find that we were in the wrong town!

Rather bewildered by this time, we let ourselves be

## EAST OF ATHENS

hustled out of the car. We had just reached the corner of the square, when an old man spoke to me. "The boat does really go from Batsi this evening," he said. "Those two men only told you that it didn't because they wanted your seats. Look behind." We did so. True enough, our two informants were just settling themselves down in our places. Indignantly, we rushed back. At that moment the driver appeared again, and started winding up his engine. Loudly, we demanded back our seats. The two men just smiled smugly, and shrugged their shoulders. The driver squeezed into his place, and said he was going. We said he wasn't going without us, and to show it, I held on firmly to the open door. Eventually I got the man out of M's place on to an empty petrol tin. The other wouldn't move, so I was obliged to sit on him until the half way halt, when we lost one of our other passengers.

At last everyone was settled. Then with a great bumping and roaring, and the emission of vast clouds of blue smoke, we got under way. The road led along the opposite slope of the valley, to the road we had explored the day before. It seemed to climb steadily. By cricking my head under the flapping hood, I could see that we were passing through a fertile country. Olive groves and orchards edged the road, with, here and there, prosperous-looking, whitewashed, green-shuttered farm houses. On every side were quantities of wild flowers. The blue delphiniums, as everywhere else, and enormous clumps of snapdragons. In many cases these were at least three feet high, pink, yellow, and deep crimson.

## BATSI

At the half-way halt, we were already on the other side of the island. It was high above the sea, and olive groves sloped steeply to the water. Beyond, the road wound downwards, following the line of the coast, with cypress trees standing sentinel at its curves. After a brief halt, we got on to our rack once more, and were jolted violently down hill. Round hairpin bends we skidded, until at last the road seemed to end. But no, there was one more hairpin, and then we finally lurched to a standstill. A yard beyond us the road ended in a steep drop.

We got out stiffly, thankful at any rate, to have arrived safely at what, we presumed, must be Batsi. The road here was evidently only under construction. It ended with the drop and a heap of stones. This was connected lower down, by a footpath, with the narrow street leading into the village. The houses stretched thinly along one side and the head of a little bay. The first street led on to a sort of promenade, well raised above the sea. This was edged with *cafés* and little general stores. A few trees and vine trellises enlivened its outer edge, where small tables stood. We all sat down at various of these tables, and ordered coffee. We had an hour to while away until the boat was due to arrive.

About half-past four, although there was no sign of any ship in sight, some sailors came and collected the baggage. This they took down to the water, and stacked in a rowboat. Five o'clock came, and half-past five, and six o'clock, but still no sign of our ship. We inquired from the sailors and the people at the *café*, and were hopefully reassured. The boat was often a

## EAST OF ATHENS

little late, nothing to speak of She would certainly arrive at any moment now

It was getting dark, and with the darkness, chilly We went inside the *café*, and sat at a long table, still straining our eyes for some sign of a light on the water We were getting hungry, but we were sure that if we ordered a meal we should never have time to eat it As each quarter of an hour passed, however, we wished that we'd ordered it a quarter of an hour previously At last I suggested brandy as being warming, and giving the illusion of food to an empty stomach We ordered two *cognacs*

Warming it certainly was I have never tasted anything quite so potent, except perhaps some *Calvados*, which I once drank in Brittany, years ago, straight from the still I payed up, two drachmae, not quite a penny for the two glasses Then as seven o'clock came and still no sign of our boat, I repeated the order It grew rapidly dark now We sat on despondently in the little *café*, drinking thimblefuls of the fiery *cognac* Periodically I made excursions to gaze hopefully at the darkening water

Even the optimistic fishermen had ceased to be encouraging when at last, at eight o'clock, a tiny light appeared far out at sea Immediately there was immense bustle. Men, women, and children rushed in to tell us that the *vapore* was really coming We were hustled down a flight of steps At the bottom the rowboat, with our suitcase and the bundles of the other passengers, was waiting In their eagerness, we were almost hauled on board

The lights of the ship still seemed very far away,

but we were rowed out to meet her. After two or three hundred yards the sailors shipped their oars, and we lay jiggling gently up and down in the darkness. She seemed very tiny when she eventually dropped anchor beside us. The row of faces gazing over the rail was scarcely above the waterline. An iron door in the side was opened, and through this we had to scramble.

The deck was only about three feet wide, and swarming with people and baggage. I had forgotten that we would just be arriving at Tinos for the pilgrimage. Twice every year there is an immense pilgrimage there; on Lady Day, in March, and again in August. In the church of the *Evangelistria*, a miraculous eikon is supposed to effect cures comparable to those of Lourdes. Twice a year thousands flock there from all parts of Greece. Some go in search of cures for themselves; some to bring their sick, who are too feeble to go alone; whilst a vast number go to make money out of the pilgrims. Twice a year, Tinos wakes from sleep. In a few days, priests and townspeople make enough to carry them on till the next pilgrimage. During that time, Tinos swarms with every type to be found in Greece. The previous August, I was told, more than sixty thousand pilgrims had arrived. Some of these found accommodation in the guest-rooms, galleries, and great courtyard of the church. The vast majority, however, slept in heaps along the streets and beach. The cheaper hotels are always crowded, but the more expensive don't do so well. This is predominantly a poor man's festival.

So now this little boat was packed with pilgrims.

## EAST OF ATHENS

Labourers, sailors and soldiers jostled black-shawled peasant women and their swarms of children. We had taken 'deck' tickets, anticipating neither the crowd of pilgrims, nor the lateness of the boat. It still blew cold on the water. We didn't, however, feel like paying a supplement to change just for three hours. So we picked out the most sheltered spot we could find, and sat huddled together on our suitcase. After a little while one of the stewards came out and looked at us. Then he went away, came back again in a few minutes, and got into conversation. Having asked all those personal questions that one becomes so used to, and learns not to resent, in Greece, he went away again. Then a young officer appeared. He gazed at us long and earnestly for several minutes, and departed. Now the steward appeared once more, this time with a message. The Captain's compliments, and would we care to go and sit in the First Class lounge. Would we, indeed? It was really getting very cold on deck. We said that we would be delighted. So we were ushered with great ceremony into the tiny lounge. Here, some dozen or so people were sitting on cushioned benches, in front of long tables. Most of them were sleeping, propped against the wall, or with their heads on the tables. We sat down thankfully.

Just beginning to doze in the fuggy heat, we were aroused by the appearance of the young officer. He sat down beside us, and speaking in quite tolerable English, introduced himself as the Captain. He asked if we were quite comfortable, and had everything we wanted. We thanked him for his kindness in allowing us to use the lounge. He had worked for many years



## BATSI

on English ships, he explained. He was always pleased to be able to help English people.

This was his first command, and he was obviously very proud of his hundred-and-sixty tonner. When his dinner was brought to him presently, he offered us fruit and the customary coffee, talking all the while of the places he had visited in England. Dinner finished, he asked rather tentatively, if I would like to go up on to the bridge with him. I might be interested to watch the ship being navigated. I said that I would be. So presently we picked our way among the sleeping pilgrims, and climbed the steep ladder to the little dark box where the wheel was. And there I stayed, trying to make intelligent conversation on navigation, and nautical matters in general, until we sighted the lights of Tinos.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### TINOS

AS we got closer in shore, we could see that the whole waterfront was brilliantly illuminated, and thronged with people. Little boats were bobbing about on the dark water. Now, from the pier on our left, more of them were being rowed out to meet us. Beyond, one of the company's larger ships lay anchored. Its decks were black with pilgrims struggling to disembark. A third ship was just leaving, empty. The boats thronged round us, in the blinding glare of the acetylene lamps. Our passengers fought towards the hole in the side, through which we had to jump.

Everything was confusion. Everyone shouted instructions and advice at the same time, sailors, boatmen, and the pilgrims themselves. Eventually our turn came. We found ourselves bundled into an already hopelessly overloaded boat. Luckily it was dead calm, for the water was within two inches of the gunwale.

On the pier, wooden barriers kept the crowds back from the landing steps. Outside one of these, we spotted our landlord of the previous visit, and struggled towards him. He welcomed us back without any show of surprise, though we had only left the day before. With long strides, he led us back to his hotel, interjecting remarks in his quaint mixture of Greek and Americanese. Inquiries about our journey, and tales

of the pilgrimage. His hotel being one of the cheaper ones, was full of pilgrims. By a piece of luck he still had one room left, though right at the top, he apologized. We didn't care, we were much too tired to do anything but fall straight into bed.

Sounds of great activity in the corridor outside woke us early the next morning. We looked out to see what it was all about. The various families of pilgrims, we found, had each set up its cooking stove, and was busy preparing breakfast. We hadn't come so well supplied. I went down to the kitchen to see what the old woman could do about it. She had coffee and goats' milk, but no bread. So I kept watch to see that nothing boiled over while she went out to fetch some.

From outside I could see the harbour. Two more ships were at anchor, both discharging large crowds of passengers. On one of the ships a band was playing, and I could see hundreds of soldiers lining the rails. After breakfast, we walked back to the pier, where the people were still being landed. A stretcher, which the living skeleton on it, can scarcely have weighed down, was being carried up the steps as we arrived, and laid under a tree. In the next boat was a hunchback woman with an enormous head. She sat between two well dressed middle-aged women, who held her hands as she twisted jerkily from side to side. From her gaping mouth, a trickle of saliva ran down her chin, and there was an idiot stare in her dark, protruding eyes. At the landing steps the other women had difficulty with her. She suddenly took fright, and started gibbering, hiding her head in her arms. For a long time she could not be persuaded to leave the boat. Then, as suddenly as she

## EAST OF ATHENS

had started, she became quite quiet again. She allowed herself to be helped on shore and led away, still hand in hand with her companions.

Everywhere one looked there were cripples. Some were walking with crutches, some with sticks, some were being helped along, or even carried. But they were only a small proportion of the mob which swarmed and jostled round the boats. The stalls where the sellers of sweets and meat balls, doughnuts and poisonous-looking drinks cried their wares, were doing a roaring trade. We followed the stream of people turning into the main street. They were climbing the long hill to where the church stood above the town.

All the way up, at every few yards, beggars displayed their sores and infirmities. Here the stump of a leg was thrust up at you. There a single eye grimaced from half a face. One wanted to hurry by, but the fascination of disgust drew one's unwilling glance. And of course, the intercepted look immediately produced loud cries, and an even more eager display of the horror. In self defence, one took an exaggerated interest in the hand-made lace, the embroideries, and the rugs. One tapped the amphoræ, and examined minutely the streaky brown, yellow and green glazes of the pottery bowls and plates. One even bought *Loukoumi* from Syros; but one whiff of the fish, spluttering and crackling in the great pans of boiling oil, was enough.

At the entrance to the church itself began more booths. Here nuns from the convent on the hill were busy. They were selling candles of all shapes and sizes, holy images from Mount Athos, embroideries, amulets, and tawdry trinkets of every description. These Greek

nuns, I noticed, were dressed entirely in unrelieved black. They wore none of the snowy white, which distinguishes the Catholic nuns costume. Even their heads were swathed in soft black material.

An arched gateway at the top of the *Via Sacra* led into a large marble paved courtyard. Round this was a double row of colonnaded galleries. Cells gave on to the galleries, where numbers of the pilgrims were lodged. Others, less lucky, had spread their rugs and mattresses wherever there was an inch of room to spare.

Crowds of filthy children played and fought round the pillars, and the dove-surmounted, white marble fountain; gift of some, evidently unorthodox, Turk, in gratitude for a cure. The church itself was high above the courtyard. It faced the entrance gates, and was approached by a long flight of steps. Seen between the clumps of tall, century old cypresses in the courtyard, the effect was quite impressive. The upward sweep of the marble staircase led on through the church, to terminate in a soaring campanile, dazzlingly white against the blue sky.

It all had a distinct appearance of newness, and in fact, the church as it now stands, was only built during the last century. It was in 1821, that a native of Tinos first saw a vision of the Virgin. She commanded him to dig at the place she would indicate. He did so, but without finding anything. It was only later, after a nun had three times reported having seen a similar vision, that the village priest was persuaded to dig under her guidance.

He unearthed a well and the ruins of a church. Over

## EAST OF ATHENS

the well and ruins, a chapel was built. This was called the Church of the Discovery, or of the Well. It was during the building of this chapel that one of the workmen cut in two with his spade, the miracle working picture of the Annunciation. The damage, though, doesn't seem to have impaired its miraculous powers. For no very valid reason, the picture is supposed to be the work of St. Luke the Evangelist. However St. Luke has been credited with so many Madonnas in various places, that he must be quite used to it. Finally, it was over this chapel, that the church of the *Evangelistria* was afterwards built.

We allowed ourselves to be carried on by the press of people behind, up the grand staircase and into the church. Here, it was certainly a case of not being able to see the wood for the trees. To begin with, after the bright sunshine outside, the church was very dark. Then it was so bedecked and hung with amulets, that it was practically impossible to see anything of the building itself. From every conceivable place hung these ex-votos of gold, silver and metal. Each represented some part of the human body, from which the donor of the ex-voto had suffered, and which the pilgrimage had, presumably, cured. Arms, legs, hands, feet, ears, eyes, noses and every possible member, twinkled dazzlingly before the eyes. As well as these, ships, horses and cattle were popular. When these ex-votos became too numerous, they are taken down and resold, to the greater profit of the Madonna and her priests.

But on our left, heavily guarded by ringletted and bearded priests, stood the *pièce de resistance*. From a

## TINOS

large plate-glass show case, the jewels of the Holy Eikon twinkled and glittered under the glare of electric bulbs. Beside it, massively incongruous, was a steel safe; for the eikon is locked away when it is not on show. A solid block of peasant women stood as close as they were allowed. Gazing open-mouthed with wonder and awe, only reluctantly did they make room for others.

All around hundreds of candles were burning. Every now and then somebody handed over a fresh one to be lit and added to their number. As each new candle was lit, the woman in charge would snuff out one of the previous ones, and put it by carefully in a box. Hardly more than a quarter of an inch of any candle can have been burnt.

Scattered all about the church were little counters, with collection boxes on them. Behind each of these sat a priest. Every now and again someone went up to one of these counters. Having put some money in the box, they knelt down, with bowed head. The Papa promptly covered them with his wide silk phylacteries, muttering prayers through his beard. All round the church, the same scene was being performed with different actors. Sometimes it was peasants, men and women, sometimes sailors or soldiers in uniform, and very occasionally a well-dressed woman.

Down below, in the crypt, where the miraculous eikon had been found, a fountain played. Here, in the Holy of Holies, pilgrims crowded round, greedily drinking the sacred water. Blue clouds of incense hung in the air, and mingled, sickly sweet, with the smell of sweat and garlic. Gasping, we struggled into the fresh

## EAST OF ATHENS

air, before we had time to witness any miraculous cures.

We made our way slowly back to the harbour. There, the restaurants were now besieged by throngs of hungry pilgrims. Everywhere carcasses of calves and sheep were hanging from hooks. Some were newly skinned, and still steaming. Cooks were hacking off great joints of meat. Waiters were dashing backwards and forwards with loads of plates. The sweat poured down all their faces. The whole quayside was covered with tables and chairs, right down to the water's edge. Every table was occupied. Groups of people stood beside anyone who looked like being nearly finished his meal, ready to pounce as soon as the place was vacant. All day long the intensive feeding continued. And late into the night, relays of waiters still ran backwards and forwards with their steaming loads.

The next morning was the culmination of the pilgrimage. From the men-of-war in the harbour, hundreds of sailors landed. These formed up on the front, along with soldiers and armed police, and marched up the hill towards the church. Here the crowd was at its densest. Scores of pilgrims had thrown themselves down on the marble staircase and courtyard, in anticipation of the passage of the eikon. Such was the mob, however, that they seemed more likely to be killed than cured.

At last the procession appeared: a blaze of rich brocades, green, gold, and yellow. The Bishop of Syros, crowned with a heavily-jewelled, gold-domed mitre, carried his *Rabdos*, a pastoral staff of entwined serpents: unconsciously appropriate at a spiritualized festival of Esculapius! Around him, priests in stuff,



## TINOS

heavy copes of embroidered cloth of gold, bore the eikon in triumph. Standard bearers staggered under the weight of lanterns and silver staves. All picked their way carefully over the recumbent bodies littering the route.

Among the procession were the Greek Admiral, lavishly be-medalled, the Minister of Marine and the Nomarch of the Cyclades, incongruous in evening dress and silk hat. The Deputy for the Isles was there. He is also the President of the Greek Chamber and head of the committee which administers the affairs of the shrine. There were naval officers and their women-folk, and on either side a double row of soldiers, sailors and police. As the procession emerged from the courtyard, the band played, and chapel bells tolled. The faithful, who crowded every window, roof top and ledge, crossed themselves devoutly at the passing of Bishop and eikon.

At last we reached the waterfront. There, the crowd was almost as great as up at the church. A platform, roofed with green boughs, had been built facing the sea. On it there were several chairs, on which the notabilities took their places. When everyone was settled, the Bishop began to preach a sermon in a resonant voice.

But all the time, one could see that his mind wasn't on the job. He kept looking anxiously at a sector of the crowd just out of our view. Soon his restlessness spread to the other people on the platform. They began to turn round, and mutter among themselves. Suddenly there was a shrill, piercing scream. A man leapt forward towards the Bishop, waving his arms wildly. Four

## EAST OF ATHENS

policemen threw themselves on him. The crowd surged backwards in alarm, almost carrying us over the edge of the quay into the harbour. It took the four policemen's combined efforts to get the man under control. He fought savagely, screaming, and foaming at the mouth. But at last, he was dragged away through the crowd.

The Bishop mopped his forehead with a large handkerchief, blew his nose vigorously, and carried on once more with his sermon. When, at last, it was over, the Deputy for the Isles came forward and kissed the cikon, the others following suit. The church bells clanged out jubilantly. The men-of-war fired a salute. The other ships in the harbour blew their sirens; and the procession started back once more for the church. The bulk of the pilgrims made haste down to the dock, in order to be the first on the boats back to Athens. The pilgrimage was over.

I had to go across to Mykonos to collect a suitcase, which we had left there. I planned to come back on the evening boat, collecting M. at Tinos, en route, and go straight on to Athens. I knew that she would have small chance of getting a ticket at Tinos, as still more pilgrims would be returning that evening. I said, therefore, that I would buy her a ticket at Mykonos, so establishing an earlier claim on a bunk. She could just come straight on board at Tinos. I had reckoned, however, without the orders of the day.

When I got back to Tinos, there were already three other ships loading up. The water was black with boatloads of pilgrims, waiting to embark. But in none

## TINOS

of these boats could I see any sign of M. Suddenly, on the other side of the ship, away out at sea, I saw a small boat. There were three people in it. I looked again. M. and a policeman, in solitary state, were being rowed towards us. I ran down the ladder, and helped her on board. The policeman saluted, and was rowed off again.

Why the police escort? I asked. Then she told me that she had very nearly not been able to get on board at all. Nobody, she said, was allowed to embark at the quay, who hadn't a ticket. Not knowing what to do, she had appealed to 'Boooat coming'. "Me fix!" said B-C. "Me get boat take you from cove." But no boatman could be found who would take the risk. They were all afraid of getting into trouble with the police for taking on board an unauthorized passenger. Things were becoming desperate, as the ship was already in sight. "O.K. me fix police," said B-C. And by some means, fix police he did, for the escort was the result. But I needn't have been jealous of her state arrival. I had to share my cabin with five more policemen.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### AEGINA

I HAVE only once so far weakened, as to go on a conducted trip; rather should I say to attempt to go on one. For the attempt cannot, even by the most optimistic standards, be put down as a success. My abominable weakness was fitly punished, as was only right and just.

I will not plead: 'the woman tempted me'. Let it suffice to say that I promised a friend that I would be her escort on a trip to the Island of Aegina, where she was anxious to explore the ruins of a temple. To this day I don't know what temple.

Aegina can be clearly seen from Athens. It was summer, and the undertaking did not seem formidable. My friend had found out all the details, and all I had to do was to meet her down at the Piræus the next morning at, I think, seven o'clock. I was to inquire for the boat which was taking the tour to Aegina, and go on board.

It seemed simple enough, and I thought I had carried out my part to perfection. I was down in good time, inquired for the boat which was taking the tour to Aegina, and before I had time to turn round was hustled on board a horrid looking little steamer.

The boat was packed with a mob of peasants, and also what was obviously a bevy of tourists. I pushed

## ÆGINA

my way round the deck, but there was no sign of Anna. I searched the upper deck without success, and had just decided to go and wait by the gang plank, when I found that we were moving. I rushed down again and made another frantic search of the lower deck, but I had certainly sailed without her.

There was nothing for it but to resign myself. Here I was, off on an excursion which I had no desire to make, certainly not on my own. I didn't even know what to do or where to go when we got to Ægina, but supposed that the best thing to do would be to follow the herd. Two Englishmen with cameras were sitting on the bench beside me. I said I supposed they were going on the tour to Ægina. They said, no, they weren't. They were going on to Nauplia. Anyhow, what tour did I mean? Did I mean the conducted tour to the temple, because if so I was on the wrong boat. I should have taken the launch which was leaving the Piræus at half-past seven. This boat went to the town on the other side of the island, miles from the temple.

I pictured Anna's face, sitting waiting for me in the launch. And I could imagine what she'd say when we met. Knowing her, I felt sure that she'd do the trip anyhow, escort or no. She wasn't the sort of woman to be put off by trifles of that sort.

I wondered if it were possible to get across the island from the town to wherever the temple lay. There might be a bus service of sorts, though even if there were, my knowledge of Greek local services made me feel sure that it would not fit in with the arrival of the boat. I might manage to save my face if only I could

## EAST OF ATHENS

appear with a certain amount of *bratura* from the other side of the island

The Englishmen were no help as they'd never been to Aegina. Athens was fading away into the morning mist. The wind had freshened slightly, and although we appeared to be sailing through a landlocked bay, the sea was beginning to be rather choppy. I looked anxiously ahead for some sign of a harbour, but all the hills looked bare and uninhabited. Someone had suggested to me that Aegina would be a nice place to live in if one worked in Athens. One could take the ferry boat over in the morning and back in the evening. It wouldn't take any longer than living in a London suburb and going into the city. As the little tub heaved and rolled on a summer morning, I began to doubt the wisdom of their suggestion.

Peasant women had begun to roll about on the deck, calling on all the saints in the Greek calendar, before we turned a small headland and came in sight of the town. Here the usual scramble into a bumboat had to be gone through, and before we were well ashore, the little steamer was lurching her way on to Poros.

Aegina presented a long dusty waterfront completely devoid, as far as my jaundiced eye could make out, of the slightest claim to either picturesqueness or charm, or indeed to any other quality save excessive dullness. Down by the water's edge, hundreds of sponges were spread out in the sun, for this is quite a large sponge fishing centre. Men were picking them over in a leisurely manner, and further along some boys were mending nets.

None of the tourists off the boat had landed, only a

## AEGINA

few of the peasants, who had now disappeared up the side streets. I saw a *café* across the road, and went over to make some inquiries. Over a cup of Turkish coffee and a glass of water, I discussed the possibility of reaching the temple. The proprietor of the *café*, being fired with a desire to please at all costs, was most optimistic. I really believe that had I expressed a wish to go to the moon, he would have been ready to swear that it was the easiest thing in the world to arrange my journey.

Anyhow he did go so far as to admit that there was no bus—not that day, at any rate. However, he could find me a car which would take me for thirty drachmae. I said: "Produce it!" So he called an imbecile looking small boy, and told him to go and look for Iannis, the son of Andreas. Did he mean the husband of Euphrosyne, who did the washing, asked the boy. Apparently he did, so the boy went off, scratching his head, and looking thoroughly incapable of finding anybody. I sat back to wait with a patience born of bitter experience; and ordered another coffee to while away the time. After about half an hour, the proprietor, who had been standing in the doorway, picking his teeth and spitting, let out a yell.

I looked up to find him waving to a little, grizzled man on the opposite side of the street. There was a loud exchange of greetings, and he turned to me. "You're lucky," he said. "Here's Iannis of the car. Stavro didn't find him, because he wasn't at his house. He says, yes, he'll take you across for thirty drachmae, if you can find him two other passengers who'll also pay thirty drachmae each." I thought how typical to

## EAST OF ATHENS

tell me the price of one seat as if it was the price of the whole car.

I saw that I should clearly have to pay for three seats if I wanted to reach my destination that day. However, the eastern habit of bargaining made me knock his price down to seventy drachmae with a promise of further reductions should he collect any more passengers en route. The bargain was sealed over more sticky coffee, and we set out to find the car, which was garaged somewhere at the back of the town.

The garage proved to be a stable yard, and the car a Ford of very early vintage. Iannis looked it over thoughtfully, opened and shut the doors, unscrewed the cap of the radiator, peered in and called loudly to Euphrosyne to bring water. While he was waiting for the water, he opened the bonnet and started tinkering about inside, occasionally throwing out a small piece of machinery on to the dusty ground. The whole proceeding meant very little to me, as I know nothing whatever about the insides of cars. But all the same, I had a nasty feeling that he was taking it to pieces.

By the time Euphrosyne, a rather handsome, Juno-esque woman appeared with a petrol can of water on her shoulder, there was quite a heap of scrap in the yard. The radiator was filled, and I asked when we were going to start. "*Siga, siga*. Little by little," said Iannis vaguely. And calling after Euphrosyne, he told her to bring me out some coffee.

I took this for the evil omen which it proved to be. It was after eleven o'clock before the heap of scrap was replaced inside the car, and the bonnet slammed down. Even then we didn't start immediately, because there



was no petrol. A small boy, who might have been sent any time during the previous two hours, went to fetch some. While he was away, I took the opportunity of going across the road, and buying half a loaf and a bunch of grapes, for which I was to be very thankful later on.

Eventually we were stocked with everything. Iannis started to wind up the engine and signalled to me to get in. With a thunderous roar, the car came to life; Iannis jumped in quickly, and we skidded perilously out of the yard.

My recollection of that journey is of an endless series of false starts. We had broken down before we left the town. The first hill we came to the car stalled, and I had to get out before it would deign to climb, myself following in the exhaust. The road really was abominable. In spite of annoyance, I sympathized with the car, which was old enough to deserve pensioning off rather than to be given such a task.

Apparently the car thought so too. When we had reached a spot which seemed to be miles from anywhere, and the road had degenerated to a mere stony track, it stopped dead with a great clatter, and refused to move another inch.

Iannis and I got out and looked underneath. The clatter had been caused by some half-dozen pieces of assorted iron, which had fallen from its inside. Iannis gathered them up and regarded them dejectedly. "What's to be done now?" I asked. "Can you mend it again?" Iannis shook his head. "No," he answered. "I can't mend it now, the something's broken." He indicated a piece of the scrap. I didn't know the word

## EAST OF ATHENS

the Greeks had for it, and the object meant nothing to me.

"Damn you and your beastly car!" I exclaimed, exasperated. "How am I going to finish my journey? How far is the temple anyhow?" Iannis looked at me reproachfully. "Come," he said. "I know a man who has two mules. He lives only a kilometre or two from here, and if he is not away working, he will hire us the mules. One will take me back to the town, and Iorgos can go with you on the other to the temple."

I had no option but to go on, unless I wanted to spend the night sitting in the broken-down car. I took out my bread and grapes, and leaving the Ford to her own devices, we set out along the road. The kilometre or two was the longest kilometre or two I have ever walked. We did not meet a soul the whole way. Eventually we came in sight of a cottage, almost hidden by an ancient fig tree, whose scent reached us when we were still a hundred yards away. There was an old man sitting under it, scraping at the soles of a pair of top boots with a penknife. He looked up at the sound of our footsteps.

"Ah, Iorgos, good day to you. How are you? Well?" called out Iannis. "Ug glugg," said Iorgos, giving a smile which showed two teeth, one top and one bottom. "He can't speak," said Iannis in an aside to me. Then: "Have you your two mules here?" he asked. "Ug glugg," said Iorgos again, getting up and shaking us both warmly by the hand. "Ug ug blaaah glugg," he called out, turning towards the house. "He's telling his wife to bring us some coffee," said Iannis. "Glugg," said Iorgos.

## ÆGINA

We sat down under the wide shade of the fig tree, glad of an opportunity to get out of the blazing afternoon sun. Presently a withered old crone appeared with minute cups of coffee, and glasses of icy cold water from the well—heavenly drink. I shared out my, now somewhat stale, bread, and what remained of the grapes, and we ate in silence, save for occasional clucks and grunts from Iorgos.

When we had finished, I started to agitate about the mules. It was nearly four o'clock. I had no idea how much further the temple was, nor even what time the tour returned to Athens. I didn't want to find myself stranded for the night on a lonely shore, with the prospect of returning the way I'd come the next morning.

Iorgos was at last roused to some activity. He produced the mules from somewhere behind the cottage. They were gaunt beasts, with rope bridles and no saddles. He threw an old blanket on the back of each, passed the rope of one to Iannis, and said: "Glugg," to me. "He means get up and he will take you to the temple," interpreted Iannis. "I will leave you now and go back to the town."

We shook hands solemnly, and each hopped up sideways on to the back of our mule. "Χαίρετε," he said, waving his hand; and, giving his mule a vicious kick, clattered off down the road. Iorgos took my mule by the improvised bridle, said "glugg" to his wife, and led me at a more sober pace in the opposite direction.

The effects of an early rising, a sea trip, a motor drive and a walk in the hot sun were beginning to make themselves felt. I shut my eyes, and dozing,

## EAST OF ATHENS

kept a precarious seat as the mule plodded along. After what seemed several hours, I was aroused by excited ug-glugging from Iorgos. I opened my eyes to find myself on the edge of a beach.

In the pink sunset glow, I saw the ruins of a temple, and down at the water's edge, a launch. A group of people were standing on the shore beside it, gazing up at Iorgos and me and the mule. I recognized Anna's tall, slim figure, and slid stiffly to earth with a sigh of relief.

She greeted me frigidly, and made no inquiries as to where I had come from. All my explanations and apologies were greeted by raised eyebrows, and a faintly supercilious "really!" I gathered that her day hadn't been a success either.

We got into the launch which was just about to start, and sat silently side by side as we chugged towards the lights of the Piræus. We landed, and I took her back in a taxi to her hotel. We bowed politely, and said good night.

After that Anna wouldn't speak to me for a week. But I didn't feel like speaking to her for a fortnight.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### CHALKIS, KIMI

I WAS left to do the journey to Skyros by myself. M. had had enough, she declared, of leaping into small boats on rough seas, and clambering about on waving ladders. For the time being, at any rate, she would stay in Athens. Myself, I had a choice of two routes. Either I might go the whole journey by boat from the Piræus, or else by train to Chalkis. From Chalkis a bus ran to Kimi, on the east coast of Euboea. Then from Kimi I could get a boat direct across to Skyros. I decided that a train journey would be a change, so set off for the station at half-past six the next morning. A large mob of people was surging around the entrance to the platforms. I was told that nobody would be allowed on until the train had arrived from the Piræus. At seven o'clock the train arrived, and a stampede began. I had only a small suitcase, and was well to the fore. I managed to secure a seat, though not in a through coach. But there must have been dozens who had to stand the whole way to Larissa, if not to Salonika.

The track ran through a rolling country of pinewoods, and occasional cultivation. The weather was perfect, though it was still only March. Tiny wisps of cotton-wool cloud sailed, far up, through a clear blue sky. After a couple of hours, we stopped at Oinoi for

## EAST OF ATHENS

breakfast On the platform were men with little charcoal stoves Pieces of meat were roasting on skewers over the fires, a fragment of fat between each two pieces of meat This was being sold along with hunks of bread—delicious breakfast!

At Oinoi I had to change into another coach, for the last hour of my journey The train crawled round the shores of a loch like bay Rounded hills screened the view on all sides, and the water was dead calm and empty On the left of the track a hill towered, a ruined castle on its summit Abruptly, the train stopped There was no town in sight, but we had obviously arrived Getting out, I found that the station was outside, on the mainland, while Chalkis itself was actually on Euboea Between them, the channel, through which, at the turn of the tide, the water races like a mill stream, at its narrowest, cannot have been more than twenty yards wide A suspension bridge led across into the town

I soon found an hotel, where I was given a pleasant room containing, no unusual thing in Greece, two beds Having had a wash, I set out to explore the town, and to find out how to get to Kimi Also, I wanted to know when the boats left there for Skyros Buses, I was told, went every morning to Kimi, but any information about boats would have to be obtained on the spot

Chalkis proved a most uninteresting town, and as devoid of beauty as of interest, so I soon returned to my hotel Here to my surprise, I found more baggage in my room I called the hostess to find out about it She hadn't understood that I wanted to engage a whole room, she said, but merely a bed, like other folk!

## CHALKIS, KIMI

Anyhow, unless I was prepared to pay a supplement, that's all I would get. Not having had a chance of looking my prospective room-mate over, I thought a supplement was called for.

The next day the weather had broken, and the rain poured down. My bus was due to leave from the station, when the train arrived. I went down a few minutes before, but there was no sign of the bus. It wasn't until the train was actually in, that I discovered that on this day, it would start from in front of my hotel. So there was nothing for it but to dash back through the pouring rain, the other passengers at my heels. When we got to the hotel the bus was just arriving, and we all packed ourselves in. I found myself next to a young commercial traveller, who had been staying in the same hotel in Mykonos.

As soon as we were all comfortably settled, the driver came along. We must all get out, he said, and change into the vastly inferior bus, which had just driven up. He wasn't going to Kimi after all. As the new bus was already half full of passengers, a wild scramble ensued. The commercial and I got seats, but those who had more baggage were left out in the rain. Whether another bus ever collected them I didn't discover, for we immediately jolted off.

We were soon out of the town; and, had the weather been finer, the scene would have been beautiful. On either side of us, stretched orchards in full blossom. Apples, pears, plums, apricots and peaches bore up great masses of white and pink under the lashing rain. But we were soon out of these, into more barren country. The road became steadily worse, our bus

## EAST OF ATHENS

rolling from side to side in the ruts. At one juncture it even descended a steep bank, in order to cross the wide, stony bed of a dried watercourse.

The woman in front of me was violently sick out of the window. This seemed to give two other women the necessary courage to do likewise. Just as I was beginning to feel that the same would soon be my fate, we lurched to rest in a small town. The commercial, who had been the journey often before, told me that this was where we had a half-hour's halt for food. We all thankfully scrambled out, demanding to know where *To'μῆροῦ*, the 'place' as the Greeks, almost as euphemistic as the Americans, call it, was located. In this case it turned out to be merely the stable yard at the back. So there was plenty of room for everyone, and no waiting in turn.

When we were all comfortable, we trooped back into the inn for food. I couldn't stomach anything except a bowl of *giourti* and some bread. I noticed, however, that the woman who had been so sick in front of me was making an enormous meal of stewed mutton and red wine. Doubtless she wanted to have something to bring up, should she feel sick on the second half of the journey.

Presently the driver came to call us to our places, and off we started once more. We seemed to climb steadily after the midway halt, the road winding endlessly through wooded hills. As it got on towards sundown, the air became bitterly cold. At last we saw the sea, far away below. In a few minutes more, we rolled into the tiny square of Kími, which sat perched on a shelf of land about half way up the mountainside.



## CHALKIS, KIMI

Above, towered beetling grey cliffs. Below, about three miles away, at the base of the mountains, the sea was breaking.

The commercial showed me the best hotel, and I immediately set out to inquire about my boat. Alas, the weekly steamer had sailed only that morning. Now I must wait two, perhaps three days for one of the local *caiques*. It would all depend whether the sea was calm enough for a small boat. These *caiques* are sloops of, generally, some ten tons burthen. They ply between most of the Greek islands, as supplementary to the irregular steamship service. Nearly all are fitted with motors, and only use sail in an emergency. So there was nothing for it but Patience. It was certainly needed.

The next day was even colder, with the sort of 'wind like a whetted knife' which Mr. Masfield pretends he craves for. Lowering grey clouds almost hid the sea. In the morning, I decided to go and investigate the port. I wanted to see how long it took to get there. The road wound down steeply through the woods. Judas trees spurted like purple flames, among the grey of the olives. They filled me with a faint nostalgia for Rome, where I had last seen them blossom, only a year ago.

Here, under the trees, one was sheltered a little from the bitter wind. The exercise, too, warmed me, for I found that it was at least three miles before I reached level ground. Then the road suddenly swung another corner, and I was at the port. A long single line of houses edged the waterfront. To the left, a stone pier jutted out, sheltering the harbour, where a few *caiques*

## EAST OF ATHENS

and rowboats lay moored. Sea and sky still looked grey and angry. But inquiries from the locals, gathered on the quayside, elicited hopeful prophecies for the morrow. Somewhat cheered, therefore, I climbed back again to the town.

That evening, I had an invitation to take drinks with the Captain of the *caïque*, at one of the *cafés*. A dark, foxy-faced man in the thirties, he did not look the least like a sailor. His three companions, however, all looked so very much the part as to make up for his deficiencies. They were all, what is often described as, 'grizzled old sea-dogs'. The eldest of them spoke a little English, of which he was very proud. He had worked on English ships in his youth, but was retired now. He lived on Skyros and was on his way to Athens on business—regarding his pension, I gathered. He would give me his name, he said, and I must ask for his house when I got to Skyros. I could rent a room there and his wife would make me very comfortable.

When the party broke up, I was warned that we would start at seven o'clock sharp the next morning, and that I mustn't be late. Knowing Greece, I was very sceptical of our starting on time. However, I was determined not to be late in case, just for once, the unforeseen should happen. The morning was dull and overcast, with still the same raw wind blowing, but I set off with my suitcase shortly after six. When I arrived at the *caïque*, there was no one aboard save a startled looking small boy. Dressed in a filthy khaki tunic, several times too large for him, he sat diligently picking his nose. When he was disengaged, I gave him my suitcase, and sat down to wait. Presently three

## CHALKIS, KIMI

more passengers arrived, and we went in search of the Captain. We discovered the two members of the crew at a *café*, drinking. We asked where the Captain was, and when we were going to sail. The Captain, it seemed, was waiting for the harbourmaster to wake up. When was that likely to occur? Oh, perhaps at eight o'clock. So that was that. We all wandered up and down impatiently, in the cold morning air.

The sky had cleared a little since the day before, but the sea was still rough enough to be unpleasant. I didn't anticipate an easy crossing. About eight o'clock I wandered hopefully back to the *caïque*. It was still untenanted. A few minutes later, however, the cabin boy reappeared suddenly through a trap door, like a pantomime demon. In his hand was a large conch shell. On this he blew lustily for several minutes until, with his swollen crimson cheeks, he resembled one of those winds, who decorate the corners of old maps. The conch served its purpose. Presently the other passengers, and members of the crew began to trickle from the quayside *cafés*, and make a leisurely progress down the pier.

The passengers were given chairs, on the forepart of the deck, and after a great commotion, and the emission of a nauseating smell of petrol, we eventually started. For the first few minutes, all seemed well. Save for the cold, that is, and the difficulty of keeping the chairs from sliding about on the deck. As we left the shelter of the pier, however, we began to pitch more and more. Unfortunately my stomach seemed to pitch in the opposite direction to the boat. In a few minutes I had to make a precipitate retreat into the

## EAST OF ATHENS

hold. There, one of the crew discovered me, being sick on to the heap of gravel that constituted the cargo. He put me lying on a bench, and covered me with a rug.

There I lay, with my eyes closed, until I was aroused by the most bloodcurdling wail. Starting up in alarm, I beheld in front of me a large white and ginger cat. It had the most diabolical squint I have ever seen. Round its neck was a rope, which was fastened to a nearby staple; it walked back and forth on the short lead, lashing its tail. Even as I looked, it threw back its head and wailed again. I shut my eyes, and tried to shut my ears, but in vain. It kept up this hideous sound at short intervals during the whole trip.

The crossing was supposed to take three hours. But as usual three and a half, and four, and four and a half hours passed, and it was nearly five hours before we drew into calm water.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### SKYROS

I STAGGERED shakily on deck, to find that we were in a landlocked bay. There were some dozen houses on the shore, and what looked like a coastguard station on the hill above. Even here, we had to change into a rowboat, for the two yards journey to land. A little *café*, with a pleasant vine-covered terrace faced us. Here, in a few minutes we were gratefully drinking cups of sweet Turkish coffee, and thawing out in the bright sunshine—welcome contrast to Kimi.

Presently I asked the host directions for reaching the town. He pointed vaguely along the road over the hill. How far? Eight miles. This was a facer. How was one to get there? "Oh, sometimes a car comes to take people from the boat; perhaps it will come later. But it came yesterday, so perhaps it won't come again so soon." Then what? Well, one might hire a donkey perhaps, or else walk. And if one wanted to spend the night here, and wait for the car to-morrow? Impossible, there was no place to stay.

This wasn't particularly heartening. However the cold of the *caïque* made the prospect of an eight mile tramp not really unpleasant. But why hadn't I brought a knapsack, like the *wandervögel*, I thought with annoyance. I remembered meeting a bunch of them in the Akropolis. Bare kneed, and sweating under their packs

## EAST OF ATHENS

and pannikins, they were earnestly absorbing *Kunst* as they went. Now had I been a *wandervogel* I would have been prepared for emergencies like this. I'd already carried that suitcase of mine three miles this morning, I didn't relish any more of it. By this time my three fellow travellers had given it up as a bad job. They were already almost out of sight, over the brow of the hill. I paid my reckoning and followed.

The road climbed up over the hill, and then wound down again on the other side. At the bottom it crossed a small bridge, and entered a long narrow valley. The valley was edged by low, rounded hills, sprinkled with olives. On the level ground were clumps of fig trees, just beginning to put on their first green, it was the last day of March, and occasional wind swept cypresses. In the fields were quantities of wild delphiniums, not so large, or such a vivid blue as in the Cyclades. There were also dwarf yellow hollyhocks, which I had not seen before, rock roses, broom and masses of smaller flowers. Particularly I noticed some fragile blooms pink, mauve, and white, like 'hundreds and thousands' on tiny stems.

I was soon forced to carry my overcoat, and a little later my jacket and pullover. It was now mid afternoon, and in the sheltered valley the sun was very hot. I had seen no sign of life all the way, and not more than three or four tiny whitewashed cottages, tucked away among the trees. Now I came again to the sea. 'This must be the other side of the island so my hopes rose. A long sandy beach stretched away to my right, filling the end of the valley. Ahead of me, the road climbed up to an open, scrub covered plateau, at the

top of the cliffs. Beyond was the sea, now tantalizingly blue and smiling. The scrub stretched up to the foot of the hills. There was no sign of a town, and no option but to go on.

At last, in the far distance a spit of sand appeared, with some scattered houses and windmills. Presently, to the left of it, a huge precipitous rock came into view. On its summit, the ruins of a castle jutted raggedly against the sky. From this angle, the scene was pure Doré. Before reaching the castle rock, the road turned once again inland into another valley. Here, olives, figs, and poplars fringed a little stream among lush meadows. White houses, with vine pergolas, and orchards began to appear. Then, as the road curved round the inner face of the rock, I saw that it was on the further slope of this, that the town was built.

The mounting terraces of flat-roofed, white houses had an eastern air. Narrow cobbled streets, like cuts in the solid surface of the town, led steeply upward. I followed the largest of these until a *café* appeared, where I could drop myself and my various bundles. When I had recovered slightly, I set about finding the house of my seafaring friend of the night before. A small child volunteered to show me the way. He led me on, ever upwards, till I nearly sat down in despair. At last we reached the house, which proved to be one of the highest in the town, with a sweeping view over sea and valley. We found it locked and barred. However one of the owner's children suddenly materialized, on hearing that someone was at the house. His mother had a vacant room, he told us, but she only let it by the month. So down we had to climb once more.

## EAST OF ATHENS

At the *café* I inquired which was the best hotel I needn't have been particular, for I found that there was none at all. What did travellers do, then? Well, the man who owned the rooms over the shop opposite let them sometimes, but he was away in Athens now, on business. What was to be done about it? Well, his daughter was in the country, but would return later in the evening. She would probably open the house for me. In the meantime I might wait in the *café*.

Eventually the girl did arrive and opened up the house. She was not living there herself, but said that she would leave the hall door unlocked. I could bolt it on the inside, when I came in at night. And with that she left me to it. It was now quite dark, but having washed and changed I decided to take a stroll before supper. I had only gone a few yards, when a young policeman joined me, glad, apparently, of a stranger to talk to. As usual, he asked me all the personal questions which seem inevitable on a first meeting in Greece. For his part, he volunteered that he came from Crete. He had been four years on Skyros, which he found very lonely. He led me on down the road into the valley, talking about Crete, and showing me what he had brought from there. At last I thought it time to turn back to the town. He then invited me to drink *cognac* with him at the *café* of a man who had been to America. So of course my whole family history had to be gone through again for the 'American's benefit.'

We parted at last, with a careful admonition on his part to beware of the people of Skyros. 'The half of them were robbers, he said. I should lock my door well at night. I soon had proof that his warning wasn't idle.



Coming back from supper, a man lounging at the corner of the street gave a shrill whistle on seeing me. A moment later, a figure darted out of my doorway, and disappeared. Whoever it was, had evidently been trying my bedroom door. After that, I was careful to search the rest of the house, before either unlocking my door, or bolting the other.

I had scarcely undressed, when there was a sharp knocking. With the thieves still in mind, I thought that this might be merely a ruse to get me to open the door. I called out that the knocker must show himself under my window. Looking out, what should I see but another policeman. He had come, he said, to ask me to be sure and bring my papers to the police station the next morning! My bed I found, consisted of planks laid on a frame, with only a thin cotton mattress over them. But it might well have been swansdown, for I slept the sleep of the thoroughly tired.

The next morning, a careful search of the house produced no sign of Τὸ'μῆροζ. I went across to ask the proprietor of the *café*, if I might use his. But all he did was to point out a small building, on an exposed hillside in the middle distance. This, he told me, was the communal privy for the whole town. As it took me nearly ten minutes to get there, I wondered what happened to the inhabitants of Skyros in an emergency!

I decided to get the police business over early. I wanted to spend the rest of the morning visiting the monastery, which was perched high above the town. I made inquiries about getting back to the port by car; my boat for Kimi sailed in the late afternoon. I was told that places could not be booked in the car, as it

## EAST OF ATHENS

often decided not to go at all I would have to wait till the last minute to find out Not so hopeful, thus, for while I might be lucky enough to go in it, yet again I might not Then, of course, it would be too late for me to go by foot It seemed that the afternoon must be devoted to suitcase lugging, alas

The police business did not take long, as my papers were all in order I saw a third policeman, who asked me if I had come to Skyros to visit Rupert Brooke's grave Nearly everyone I met on the island asked me the same question R B seems to have become almost a local diety, like Stevenson, in Samoa I said "No, that I never visited tombs or monuments " I cannot feel that the Spirit lives in such places, though here it well might, the earth is lovely enough His will live in his letters, principally In some of his verse, too, false though much of it seems to-day, when the bugle's notes are drowned in the clarion call to fresh wars And the rich Dead, who died to make the world safe for Dictatorships, their voices are drowned too

But the morning was too beautiful for sad thoughts A light breeze blew from a sea, sparkling in the hot sun, and the scent of wild thyme filled the air The first of April, All Fools Day! Was I such a fool, I wondered, to be on Skyros with the sun shining, and the breeze blowing? Then I thought of the *caïque*, and my homeward journey, and wondered again Still wondering, I bent my steps upward towards the monastery

It was a stiff climb, and left the town well below One looked sharply down, on to the white roofs of the little houses, and further still, on to the curiously foreshortened shapes of the poplars and fig trees in the

## SKYROS

valley. Away to the right, the spit of yellow sand, with its white houses and windmills, stretched out to sea. Two jagged lines of reef made a striped pattern, with the sand and sea: Blue, white, blue, white, blue, yellow.

The monastery consisted of several dilapidated whitewashed buildings, grouped haphazardly round a small courtyard. I hesitated at the entrance, but everything seemed deserted. Not even a dog, or a hen came to investigate the intruder; so I went on. The path continued through an arch on the other side of the courtyard. Soon I was well above the monastery, too. At last I found myself, wind buffeted, on an open space at the top of the hill. Around me were some ruins, not very imposing. I recognized my Doré-like castle of the day before.

The view was superb. In all directions stretched sea and hill and valley, in a boundless panorama. Every detail was finely etched in the clear, thin air. I sat down among the rosemary and wild lavender, to rest. My only companions were a goat, and her tiny black and cream kid, who came and gazed at me intently. Evidently they must have decided that I was harmless, for the mother presently went on eating. The kid gambolled around me for a time, and then lay down to sleep between my legs.

I don't know how long I sat gazing at my last island; my last for a while, at any rate. But at length it was time to wander down again to the town. Reluctantly, I shouldered my suitcase for the eight mile walk to the port. Here, however, a joyful surprise awaited me, in the shape of a real steamer. This landed me at Kimi

## EAST OF ATHENS

in what seemed, after the *caïque*, an incredibly short time. And so back to Athens.

There life, it seemed strange to find, was going on just the same as it had been a week before. In the Millers' drawing-room a heated discussion was in progress. The topic was that old favourite, the iniquities and foibles of, what its members like to refer to as the F.O.

It appeared that the bag from the Legation in Athens, left for London once a fortnight. It took, however, a week to reach there; that is two or three days longer than the ordinary mail. Now for the first time, some interfering person had asked why this should be. They were blandly told that the bag had to wait three days in Belgrade, for the one from Ankara. It never seemed to have occurred to anyone concerned, that the Athens bag might leave two days later, or the Ankara bag two days earlier! Oh, wonderful F.O., which at any rate provides tea time gossip for English exiles abroad!

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Xaipete

IT was our last day in Greece. At least we thought it was. The ship that was to take us to Gibraltar was not due until ten o'clock. Not until after she had arrived, would we know if there was any accommodation for us. We had stayed the night down in the Piræus, in order to be on the spot.

At ten o'clock our baggage was piled hopefully in the hall of the hotel, and I set out for the shipping company's office. Had the *Orion* come in yet? I asked. Yes, she had just arrived. Good. Did they know yet if there was any accommodation? No, they couldn't tell me anything, because the man who dealt with that had just gone on board the *Khedivial Mail*, and wouldn't be back before noon. When was the *Orion* due to sail? I then asked. About two o'clock.

I was too hardened to this sort of thing to get angry. I knew anyhow, that it wouldn't do the slightest good. Instead, I rang up the *American Express* in Athens, who had made the preliminary arrangements for our tickets. I have always found them the most competent and obliging travel agents. Now when I explained what had happened, they promised to send a man down at once. He should have been down in the Piræus in three quarters of an hour at the most. What became of him *en route*, I don't know, but it was half-past twelve before he eventually appeared. There was accommoda-

## EAST OF ATHENS

tion, all right, we found. But by the time we had our tickets, it was one o'clock.

"You'll have to take all this stuff through the Customs," the *American Express* man told me, pointing to our pile of baggage. "Surely they'll be shut at this hour," I said, looking at my watch. I knew something of the closing habits of the Balkans. "Oh, no," he replied reassuringly, "they're always open." Officially, however, he was wrong. By the time we had found a taxi, and driven to the Customs House, it was quite definitely not functioning.

We left our baggage-piled taxi outside, and dashed into the yard. There was no one in charge except a porter. "Now, what's to be done?" I exclaimed. "We shall miss the boat." "Give the porter twenty drachmae," said the *American Express* man. I did so. Having first carefully put away the money, the porter then rummaged in his trousers pocket. Producing a dirty, crumpled piece of paper, he smoothed it out carefully, revealing a large official-looking stamp. "Now, what have you got?" he asked. We told him; so many trunks, so many suitcases. He wrote it all down carefully over the official stamp, waved it about to dry it, and then passed it to the *American Express* man. "O.K.," said the latter, "that's fixed. Now we'd better hurry."

We climbed back into the taxi, from which the baggage had never been moved. The driver put his foot on the accelerator, and his hand on the horn. Roaring and honking, we rattled towards the dock. A morning of delays; a little graft, a little speed, a lot of noise; could we have bidden a more typical farewell to the Near East? I doubt it!